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Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

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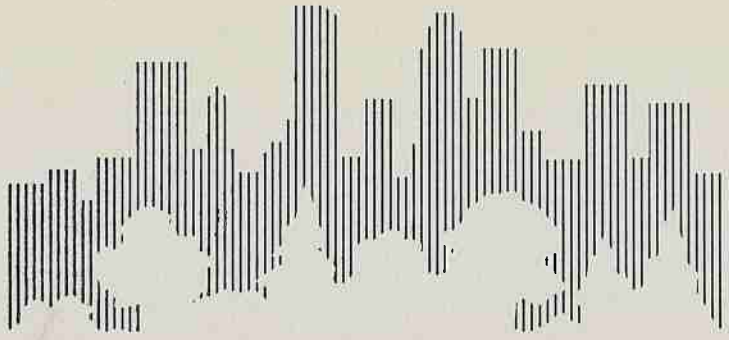

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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

Bonnie Beckel

Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

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Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

By

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree.

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Abstract of Thesis

Teaching Staff Responses to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

Study Focus: Exploratory Research, Descriptive Data Analysis

A written survey of teachers and educational assistants in the Minneapolis Public Schools explored teaching staffs' awareness of their own emotional and behavioral responses to children with acting out behaviors and how such responses impact their effectiveness at helping children resolve their acting out behavior problems. The major findings of the study were: 1) the 18 teaching staff respondents were aware of experiencing a broad range of emotional and behavioral reactions to children with acting out behaviors and 2) most reported that they were working to modify an individually unique aspect of how their emotional responses interfered with their effectiveness as behavior managers. Most respondents were aware that misguided behavior management strategies can harm children. Teaching staff at one of the three schools appeared to be more supported by social programs in their school and in turn, seemed less overwhelmed by the challenges presented by children with acting out behaviors. Their concerns were focused on children with discouraged behaviors. Teaching staff appeared to experience more of a tendency to blame children for their behavior problems, to assume their ability to control their behavior if they cared to do so, and to feel more frustrated and discouraged about their ability to help children with *extreme* behavior problems. These findings point to the need for more grounding in theories and research about children with acting out behaviors and principles and practice of behavior management. Key social work implications are the kinds of practical support requested by teaching staff: more collaboration in classrooms with behavior specialists and other adults, more supported training and practical feedback in using applied behaviorism, and more parent training and parent support services.

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Chapter 1--Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Many elementary school teaching staff respond less than effectively to children who act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors. Teaching staffs' emotional and behavioral reactivity to those behaviors may be impeding their effectiveness as behavior managers. Research by Brophy and McCaslin (1992) has shown that teachers' responses to children with these behavior problems are often minimally grounded in theory and treatment principles, and are often blaming and assume that children with these problems could control their behaviors if they wanted to do so. The research found that teachers *generally* responded to children's behavior problems with concern and attempts to help, but that this was not the case when the children's behaviors threatened or irritated them, as was frequently the case with hostile-aggressive and defiant behaviors. The Brophy and McCaslin study (1992) found that teachers responded to children with these particular behavior problems with the *least* long term solutions that addressed the causes of the problem behavior, and the *most* anger, rejection and emphasis on short term control and punishment. Feeling threatened, frustrated and discouraged are common responses to disruptive and aggressive behaviors. Unfortunately those feelings and behavioral reactions can reinforce aggressive and disruptive behaviors instead of supporting the development of pro-social behaviors (Barkley, 1981; Eron, Walder & Lefkowitz, 1971; Patterson, 1982).

Conceptual Definition of *Acting Out Behaviors*

Since the focus of concern in this study was teaching staff responses to "children who act out defiant , aggressive or disruptive behaviors", a conceptual understanding of these behaviors is needed at the outset. Research indicates that disruptive, defiant, and aggressive behaviors may reflect the difference between internalizing and externalizing strategies that children use for coping with the stress in their lives (Blatt, D'Affliti, & Quinlan, 1979). This distinction is implied in the two scales of a survey instrument called

the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1984). The two scales describe internalizing and externalizing behaviors. They reflect the distinction between fearful, inhibited, over controlled behavior, and aggressive, antisocial, under controlled behavior. In other words, one group of children with excessive stresses in their lives are internally depressed and anxious, but externally cooperative, while another group of children with excessive stresses in their lives are also internally depressed and anxious, but externally acting out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors. The prognosis for recovering from early hurtful experiences is greater for children who use more socially accepted coping strategies (Dugan, 1989b). This concept is key to this research because improving teachers' ability to respond effectively to less socially accepted coping strategies could make a difference in the prognosis for recovery by children with acting out behaviors.

Research Questions

This research project will investigate the perceptions of elementary school teaching staffs' behavior management role in relation to children who act out disruptive, defiant, or aggressive behaviors. The study has two research questions: As noted in the literature, these emotional responses are entwined with attitudes, patterns of interaction and attributional inferences about why children act out these behaviors and what is involved in the process of managing that behavior.

1) What emotional and behavioral responses to children with acting out behaviors do teaching staff acknowledge having?
2) How do teaching staff think their own emotional and behavioral responses to children's acting out behaviors impact their effectiveness as behavior managers?

This study is concerned with two groups of people: 1) elementary school teaching staff who work with children with acting out behaviors and 2) children with these kinds of behaviors. The focus of the research is teaching staff and their responses.

The exploration of relationships between teachers and children in elementary schools is potentially useful because schools are important sites for socialization experiences in the lives of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rohrkemper, 1984). The literature refers to schools as ideal places for working on behavior problems. Schools are one of the natural environments of children and thus one of the major sites where children put social skills into practice. The literature thus frames schools as logical and appropriate sites for behavior problems to be analyzed and treated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coker & Thyer, 1990). In addition, that understanding is echoed in the general acceptance in our culture that one of the roles of schools is to help with the appropriate socialization of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rohrkemper, 1984).

Schools are the sites of important socialization experiences in children's lives. These experiences occur predominantly in the context of relationships between peers and relationships between children and their teachers and educational assistants in the schools. This study focuses on acting out behavior problems as a challenge for elementary school teachers and educational assistants. Many researchers have identified behavior problems as a major concern for school teachers (Pomije, 1990; Rohrkemper, 1984; Seeman, 1988) This study includes educational assistants because they deal with virtually the same challenges as teachers in relation to children who act out disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors (Blalock, 1991).

Reasons for This Study

Research which focuses on how teaching staffs' emotional reactivity to acting out behaviors impacts behavior management efforts is limited. The particular methodology of exploring teaching staff perceptions of these issues has rarely been used. Additionally research that explores the experience of both teachers and educational assistants is non-existent. Both groups of teaching staff play key roles as behavior managers of children in schools (Blalock, 1991, Pomije, 1990).

Thus research about teaching staff responses and how they impact teaching staff effectiveness as behavior managers may be useful in the following ways:

1) Understanding these challenges from the perspective of teaching staff will inform those who define their jobs as supporting teaching staff--social workers, teaching staff unions, school principals, and school system staff who plan training for teachers and educational assistants.

2) This study gathered information that makes it possible to respond to teaching staff needs based on the particular kinds of support they stated would be useful around these issues.

3) School social workers are often called upon to support teaching staff by responding to behavior management emergencies, as well as facilitating the process of planning and carrying out behavior management plans. Understanding the emotional challenges faced by teaching staff may facilitate social workers' own process of re-evaluating their responses to children with acting out behaviors.

This is an exploratory study. It sought to better understand the nature of the problem that many teaching staff respond less than effectively to children with acting out behaviors. This study gives self-reported descriptions of teaching staffs' feelings, attitudes and behaviors in response to children they identify as having acting out behaviors. The study gives self-reported descriptions of the impact of teaching staffs' responses on their behavior management efforts with children.

Definition of Terms

Children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors is used as one concept, one variable. Parts of the phrase are not intended to be mutually exclusive, although these behavior patterns can co-exist in the same individuals or by themselves. This variable will often be shortened into the phrase *children with acting out behaviors* or *children with acting out behavior problems*.

Disruptive, defiant and aggressive describe a set of behaviors that share certain commonalties as behaviors. They are behaviors that are often difficult for teaching staff in similar ways. Research on resiliency indicates the roots of these behaviors may lie in the excessively stressful lives of children (Haan, 1989; LeCroy & Rose, 1988; Wallach, 1993). More specifically:

Disruptive behaviors are behaviors that interrupt the normal continuance of classroom or school activities, as perceived by teaching staff. Examples include not listening quietly while the teacher is presenting a lesson and socializing with or bothering other learners instead of being on task.

Defiant behaviors are behaviors characterized by bold resistance to the authority of teaching staff or open disregard of teaching staff directions.

Aggressive behaviors are behaviors intended to cause injury (Eron et al., 1971) to other children or teaching staff, such as kicking or hitting.

Children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors means children identified by teaching staff as those with behaviors that challenge them in the ways described in the definitions of disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors above. This is similar to the definition of "serious misbehavior" used by Evertson and Veldman (1981) in their study of changes in teacher behavior over time. They defined serious misbehavior as student behaviors judged by the teacher or outside observer to be extreme and disruptive to the class. The perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of teaching staff have their roots in teaching staff's experiences. Two of the most important factors are teaching staff members' early experiences in their families and communities of origin with discipline issues and racial differences (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991). Greater specificity about these behaviors is left to the perceptual discretion of the respondents. This corresponds with the methodology of the study which does not define the variable for the participants.

Teaching staff is all the people who work in instructional roles in elementary schools. This includes classroom teachers, educational assistants, special education and Chapter I

teachers, and special subject teachers (physical education, art, foreign languages, science, media, music, English as a second language).

Behavior management is the whole range of actions taken by teaching staff in order to create and maintain a learning environment, especially as those actions relate to disciplining individual children and children as a group.

Responses means both emotional, feeling level reactions and behavioral, action level reactions.

Helping children with these behavior problems means successfully assisting a child to get their behavior under their own prosocial control (Eron et al., 1971).

Attributions are the expectations and interpretations teaching staff make about children they perceive as acting out disruptive, aggressive or defiant behaviors.

Self-efficacy means the self-evaluation teaching staff make of their own effectiveness in working to help children resolve their acting out behavior problems.

Reciprocity of interactions means that teaching staff and children's responses can be reactive or correspondent to one another and mutually reinforcing.

Chapter 2--Review of the Literature

Attributional Inferences, including Self-Efficacy

This study explores the emotional and behavioral responses of teaching staff to children with acting out behaviors. The literature explores two major emotional "contributors" to teaching staff responses. These contributors are attributional inferences and self-efficacy as behavior managers. Awareness of one's personal power to succeed in behavior management interactions with children can make the difference between success and failure (Safran, 1989; Kauffman, Lloyd, & McGee, 1989; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Doris and Brown, 1980). Each teaching staff members' sense of self-efficacy and set of attributional inferences reflect personal perspectives about one's self and about children who act out disruptive, aggressive or defiant behaviors.

The research describes six different kinds of attributions (Rohrkemper, 1984): controllability, locus of causality, stability, globality, intentionality and self-efficacy.

- Controllability is the assumption of a children's ability to control their behavior if they wanted to do so.
- Locus of causality is an attribution about whether behaviors are caused by factors within the child, such as trying to get attention or external to the child, such as parental or societal influences.
- Stability is an attribution about how changeable the behavior is. The child's ability to change as opposed to the child's willingness to change may be the particular way this attribution is expressed.
- Globality is the assumption of the child's ability or inability to control his or her behavior across different settings.
- Intentionality is an attribution that the child is (or is not) continuing to misbehave on purpose.
- Self-efficacy, is an attribution made by a teacher or educational assistant about her own ability to help a child regain control of his or her pro-social behaviors.

These definitions (Rohrkemper, 1984) reflect the perspective of the concerns of this study, but are adaptable to analysis of attributions of anyone's behavior, for instance children's assumptions about why teachers treat children differently from one another. The most pertinent attributions to this study are attributions of controllability, locus of causality, and intentionality. Attributions assign credit or blame to children for their behaviors. All attributions have a relationship to self-efficacy--how hopeful or hopeless it seems to be to positively affect a child's behavior.

Researchers and theorists have made an important connection between how teaching staff feel about 1) their own ability to help children with acting out behavior problems, 2) their attributions about children's misbehaviors and 3) how those attributions contribute to the ways teachers handle those behavior problems (Soderman, 1985; Brophy and McCaslin, 1992; Brophy and Rohrkemper, 1981: Doris and Brown, 1980; Eron et al., 1981). Teaching staff who don't feel capable of helping children with these problems may feel it's emotionally necessary to abdicate their responsibility, making the problem wholly the child's. A study by Doris & Brown (1980), found that teaching staff who felt capable of effectively helping children with these problems, had a greater sense of personal responsibility for helping students resolve their behavior problems. If teaching staff feel effective at helping children with these problems, they can take on the responsibility of doing so. If teaching staff don't feel effective as behavior managers, they may conclude that children misbehave intentionally.

Brophy and McCaslin (1992) conducted a study of 100 teachers to analyze their behavior management responses to twelve different behavior problems. Three of the behavior problems were the ones focused on in this study--defiant, aggressive and disruptive behaviors. The teachers were interviewed about how they would respond to twelve vignettes describing children with twelve different behavior problems. Their self-reported descriptions of how they would respond to those behavior problems were coded to identify attributions, sense of self-efficacy, and how teachers would deal with children

with different kinds of problems. Teachers were observed in the classroom, to analyze their responses to behaviors. School principals were surveyed about their evaluation of the teachers' behavior management ability (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Teachers' attributional inferences of blaming children for their lack of control over their behavior and taking children's behavior personally were explored in the Brophy and McCaslin (1992) study. Children with hyperactive or distractible behavior were seen as able to control their behavior if they tried, but not necessarily seen as intentionally misbehaving. But children with hostile-aggressive and defiant behaviors, on the other hand, were seen as intentionally misbehaving (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). Attributions that children aren't trying to behave essentially mean holding the child responsible for his or her failure. The complex issues of a child's behavior problem can get boiled down to the child not making the effort needed to conform to certain standards (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Attributional inferences about whether a child is misbehaving intentionally, not trying to behave, or misbehaving in order to irritate the teacher were found to have an effect on the way teachers handle those behavior problems. As noted in the initial problem statement, teachers responded to children with these particular behavior problems with the *least* long term solutions that addressed the causes of the problem behavior, and the *most* anger, rejection and emphasis on short term control and punishment (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Another important study by Brophy and Rohrkemper (1981) analyzed the influence of "ownership" of problems on 1) teachers' perceptions of behavior problems and 2) their strategies for handling them. From the perspective of this study, the crux of the matter is "for whom is this behavior a problem?" 98 teachers were read vignettes about children with chronic behavior problems and asked how they would respond if they were faced with each behavior management challenge. The same twelve kinds of behavior problems explored in the Brophy and McCaslin (1992) research were used in this study.

Some acting out behaviors are considered "teacher owned problems" because they can interfere with teachers' ability to meet their own needs for authority and control in the classroom (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981). Examples include anger, defiance, and out of control behavior. The study described the common human phenomena of taking other people's behavior as a threat to getting our own needs met.

"Student owned problems" are those which frustrate the child's progress toward their own goals of academic and social success. Examples are behaviors that come out of feelings of inadequacy: shyness, reluctance to try. "Shared problems" are ones that aren't a direct threat to the teacher's authority, but reflect the child's difficulty in meeting the expectations of the "ideal student" role, and thus create behavior management problems for the teacher. Examples include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, tattletaling, pouting. "Shared ownership" problems posed an immediate threat to the smooth running of the classroom, but not a threat to control of the classroom. In addition these behaviors pose a threat to the student's learning progress and/or self-assessment (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981).

When teachers' needs were thwarted by children's problem behaviors, teachers made the attribution that the child had the ability to control their behavior if they cared to and that the child was intentionally continuing to act out. As found in other research (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992), other kinds of behavior problems (both "child owned problems" and "shared problems") were treated with much more empathetic concern. "Shared problems" were met with irritation at most. In terms of attributions of intentionality and the child's ability to control the behavior, children with "shared ownership" behavior patterns were seen as capable of controlling their behavior if they wanted, but not seen as intentionally misbehaving. Children presenting "student owned" problems, such as low ability or shyness, were seen as neither able to control their behaviors nor misbehaving intentionally (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981).

Brophy and Rohrkemper (1981) described the research about human behavior in helping situations. The likelihood of an onlooker helping a victim depends on the onlooker's attributions about the "locus of causality" of the victim's problem and the control the victim has over their plight. If the child's problem is their fault and they could stop doing it if they wanted to, the "helper", in this case the teaching staff, is unlikely to respond with concern and a desire to be helpful (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981). It is the researcher's contention that people often experience behaviors that come out of rage and terror (mistrust, out of control, defiance) as problems for them personally. We are fooled into thinking the child wants to act out, unaware of the reality that nobody *wants* to be rageful and scared, that problems this study identifies as "teacher owned" are a problem for the child as well. Professional growth around this issue lies in recognizing all behavior problems as "student owned problems", regardless of the automatic responses we may have to acting out behaviors.

The three different types of attribution about three different levels of "problem ownership" were associated with very different patterns of teacher goals and strategies. Strategies in response to "teacher owned" problems were more frequent punishment, less communication, and a focus on short term goals of getting the behavior to stop and maintaining control of the group. By contrast, "student owned" problems were approached with strategies of encouragement, more communication with the child, and long term mental health goals of helping the child develop social and academic skills and become self-affirming. Strategies in response to "shared ownership" problems were between these two extremes. They were characterized by little punishment, rewards, praise, and the use of structured behavior modification strategies with specific objectives.

Thus, attributions about children with "teacher owned" behavior problems can lead to self-defeating expectations by teaching staff that they won't be able to help the child get their behavior under their own pro-social control and to the use of counter productive behavior management strategies. These behaviors result in a deterioration of the teacher's

relationship with the child and an escalation of the behavior problem. Automatic human responses to acting out behaviors are counterproductive to effective behavior management (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981).

A related finding in the literature is that teachers feel that children with acting-out behaviors are the most difficult to work with (DeStefano, Gesten, & Cowen, 1977). DeStefano et al. (1977) suggests that this belief contributes to the attribution that children with aggressive and defiant behaviors cannot be helped. Brophy and Rohrkemper, (1981) found that teachers are more confident about being able to affect change to behaviors that they don't see as intentional on the child's part. Teachers' discouragement and powerlessness apparent in these findings links concepts of attributions to concepts of self-efficacy. Low self-efficacy is essentially an attribution made about one's own ability to help children resolve their behavior problems, i.e. to effect lasting change.

Self-Efficacy

A number of studies have made a connection between teachers' sense of their own effectiveness and their actual effectiveness as behavior managers. In a study of Australian teachers, Safran (1989) found that teachers' belief in their own effectiveness was the only important predictor of high ratings as a behavior manager. Several other researchers found that teachers with a greater sense of their own effectiveness were willing to take on children with more difficult behavior problems, and considered fewer behaviors difficult to manage (Kauffman et al., 1989: Meijer & Foster, 1988: Doris & Brown, 1980).

Much of the literature looks at self-efficacy from the perspective of its impact on special education referrals. Not surprisingly, researchers found that teachers who felt more capable of handling difficult behavior problems made fewer special education behavior referrals (Bucholz & Pruitt, 1986; Meijer & Foster, 1988). Research by Brophy and McCaslin (1992) found that *in general* teachers believed they could effect

improvements in children's behavior. But they were the least confident about their effectiveness with students who were low achieving, hostile-aggressive and defiant.

Pomije (1990) stated that the belief that you are not competent to manage a situation, can easily add to your own stress and thus your effectiveness as a behavior manager. Soderman (1985) described the interactive nature of adults' responses to children who act out difficult behaviors:

> "Less confident adults will doubt themselves when children are difficult. They will feel guilty and be anxious about the child's future and their relationship with the child. Unless the behaviors can be modified, a sense of helplessness may begin to influence all interactions with the child. Hopes and dreams of being a competent parent or teacher may yield to the harsh reality that the child is unhappy, out of control and not developing to their full potential. The adult may become disapproving and even rejecting, which places additional stress on the child."

Analysis of the two sets of attitudes together--attributional inferences and low self-efficacy--paints a picture of teaching staff who increasingly blame children for their behavior problems as they grow discouraged about their ability to help.

Reciprocity of Interactions

Much of the literature explores the dynamics of interaction patterns of response between adults and children with acting out behaviors. Children's behaviors are often dependent on the reactions of the people with whom they're interacting (Barkley & Cunningham, 1980; Barkley, 1981; Eron et al., 1971; Fry, 1983; Patterson, 1982). This is essentially a behaviorist perspective that teaching staff' and children's responses are reactive to one another and mutually reinforcing. Soderman (1985) said children's behaviors are continually being modified or intensified depending upon adults' responses to them.

Fry (1983) conducted research which revealed the negative progression of teachers' effective responses to all of the children in their classrooms, but the negative

progression of their responses was particularly dramatic in relation to students with problem behaviors. The children's behaviors, in turn, escalated.

The study explored qualitative differences in interactions between 44 teachers and their students from January through April. The data gathered was based on observed classroom interactions between students and teachers. There were changes in the behavior of both teachers and students over the four month period. Teachers exhibited declining amounts of positive affect (affirmations, attention), increasing amounts of negative affect (reprimands, criticism) and declining amounts of sustaining feedback (additional attention given when responses to questions were inaccurate), in relation to *all* of the students. But children with problem behaviors received far more negative affect and less sustaining feedback from their teachers over the four month observation period than the other children.

The children with problem behaviors, in turn, acted out more (quantitatively and qualitatively) serious misdemeanors (acting out behaviors). Progressively over the four month period, the children with problem behaviors also had less sustained attention on task.

These results have important implications for the mental health needs of children with acting out behaviors, in terms of both their academic and their behavioral self image. Fry (1983) concluded that for children with problem behaviors, more so than for other children, their behavior may be determined largely by the immediate classroom environment and the teachers' daily positive or negative interactions. The teachers' withdrawal of involvement had a more direct influence on these children's ability to keep their attention on-task and cooperate with other behavioral expectations.

The Roots of Acting Out Behaviors

As noted in previous discussion, attributional inferences contribute to teaching staff behaviors towards children with acting out behaviors. Teaching staffs' attributional

inferences may lack grounding in research findings about what causes children to act out aggressive, disruptive or defiant behaviors (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992). What follows is an exploration of the root causes of children's acting out behaviors.

The literature on this topic is seldom found in the same context as information about the attributional inferences made by teachers. The literature about children with acting out behaviors concludes that the causes vary widely from one child to the next. It is becoming generally accepted that children who act out these behavior patterns have experienced or are currently experiencing excessive stresses in their lives (LeCroy & Rose, 1988; Wallach, 1993). Dunn and Plomin (1990) found that individuals, even in the same family, respond differently to similar stresses. A Minneapolis Public Schools document entitled "T.L.C.: Coping with Violence" described violent behavior as the result of unattended loss of power, safety, self worth, love, choice, hope. Many young children in the United States experience a compounding of stresses in their lives: frequent, emotionally difficult life changes, daily lives that lack overt support, hurtful experiences as the norm of their daily lives. Some of the stresses children may experience include exposure to violence in the home or community, parental abuse or neglect, inadequate food, housing, health care, frequent moves and school changes, parental discord, being a minority in a majority culture, parental psychosis, chronic illness, chemical abuse, rejection by peers, and coping with developmental disabilities, and personal learning difficulties (LeCroy & Rose, 1988). Children who act out disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors are a highly heterogeneous group. The "roots" of why children act out these behaviors are as unique as each individual child.

Stress and Development

Another important aspect of understanding why children act out these behaviors is developmental. The literature concludes that the consequences of stress in the lives of children are more profound because children are not developmentally ready to cope with such challenges (Haan, 1989; LeCroy & Rose, 1988). As children mature they acquire the

knowledge, experience and power that enable them to act in a wider range of complex situations. In addition, children are an especially vulnerable group of people because they have little control over the basic aspects of their lives referred to above (LeCroy & Rose, 1988).

Externalizing and Internalizing Responses

The literature describes two very different paths that children's development takes in response to excessively stressful life experiences. Children with stressful lives appear just as likely to be quietly cooperative and internally depressed and anxious, as they do to be acting out disruptive, defiant and aggressive behaviors, and be internally depressed and anxious (Luthar, 1991). Researchers found that both groups of children are struggling emotionally (Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1984, Blatt, et al., 1979, Farber & Egeland, 1987). An important distinction between the two groups, though, is that quietly cooperative but depressed and anxious children (internalizing patterns) have a greater likelihood of resiliency, of eventually succeeding with the challenges they take on in their adult lives (Dugan, 1989).

The literature on resiliency concludes that children with oppositional, aggressive, behaviors, on the other hand (externalizing patterns), are less likely to thrive. Asher and Hymel (1986) found that the low social status "rejected", was more likely to persist over time and place. A common example is a child who was rejected in his second grade class continuing to be rejected in his third grade classroom group. Eron, et al. (1971) studied the relationship between status measured sociometrically in childhood and adjustment later in the same children's lives. The results suggested that rejected children are more likely to experience serious difficulties later in life. They may continue to seek only to avoid negative responses and punishments and may not see themselves as people who act prosocially (Eron, et al., 1971).

Summary of Literature Review

Common attributional inferences about children who act out aggressive, defiant or disruptive behaviors, have been shown to be related to ineffective goals and strategies of school behavior management. In particular, teachers' attributions of intentionality and common feelings of discouragement about their ability to help students have been found to go hand-in-hand, resulting in the use of short term goals, to the exclusion of meeting children's mental health needs. In terms of "ownership of the problem", teachers reacted the least effectively to students whose behaviors were a threat to control of the classroom or their self-image as a competent teacher. Analysis of the influence of interaction patterns between teaching staff and children reveals that when they deteriorate, the effects on children with acting out behaviors are more detrimental than the effects on other children. Analysis of the literature on the roots of acting out behaviors reveals growing acceptance that they are one coping strategy in response to excessive stresses in children's lives. This literature review of research studies and theories that relate to teaching staff responses to children with acting out behavior problems and the impact of those responses on their effectiveness as behavior managers points to a need for a study based on teaching staffs' perceptions of these issues. Progress on these issues may be a function of growing awareness of personal responses and opportunities to re-evaluate their impact on themselves and their students. Thus there is a need for a study which focuses on the questions:

1) What emotional and behavioral responses to children with acting out behaviors do teaching staff acknowledge having?
2) How do teaching staff think their own emotional and behavioral responses to children's acting out behaviors impact their effectiveness as behavior managers?

Chapter 3--Methodology

Research Design

The data collection tool utilized in this exploratory, qualitative study is a survey instrument developed by the researcher. Numerous previous studies have investigated teacher attitudes and analyzed interactions between students and teachers (Fry, 1983; Brophy & McCaslin. 1992; Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981, Coleman & Gilliam, 1983), but few have asked teaching staff directly about the feelings they experience in working with children with acting out behaviors, and explored their perceptions of how those feelings impact their effectiveness as behavior managers.

Although only one method of data collection will be utilized, the use of many different perspectives to interpret a single set of data (Patton, 1987) will be used to guard against systematic error.

School System Research Review

The Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) conduct a review process of proposals for doing research in the school system. An application to conduct a study in the Minneapolis Public Schools was completed and sent to William L. Brown, Ph.D. in the office of Research, Evaluation and Testing (see Appendix C). The primary concerns of the MPS research review process are to understand the purpose of the study, its methodology and how the MPS will benefit from the study. Approval from the MPS to conduct the study was granted on February 17, 1994.

Ensuring Confidentiality / Limiting Risks

The researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process established at Augsburg College, to ensure confidentiality and limit risks to participants in research studies. This was important because the issue explored by this study had the potential of bringing up difficult feelings for the teaching staff surveyed. Approval from the IRB to proceed with the study was granted on March 14, 1994.

The following precautions were taken to minimize risks: The researcher made it clear to respondents that their informed consent to participate in the study was sought. Respondents were also told that if they decided to complete the survey, they were free to skip questions on the survey. Respondents were informed that their decision about whether or not to participate in the study would not affect their current or future relations with the Minneapolis Public School system, their particular school or school principal, Augsburg College, or this researcher. Participants were informed verbally and on the survey's cover sheet that their responses on the survey would be kept confidential, excepting the researcher and the thesis advisor. No information that identified respondents as individuals was put on the surveys. In addition, any published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants. Teaching staff were asked not to give their names or the names of children they've worked with on the survey, in order to protect their privacy. Participants were invited to call the researcher or the thesis advisor with questions or concerns about the study.

The IRB was informed that research records will be kept in the home of the researcher, until July 30, 1995, where only the researcher will have access to the collected data. No one has access to identifying information of teaching staff who participated in the study. Only the researcher, the thesis advisor and the participating schools will have any knowledge of which Minneapolis Public Schools took part in the study.

Data Collection Process

Seven elementary schools were randomly selected to be invited to participate in the study. Seven principals were approached about their staff taking part in the study; three agreed to support the study, four declined. Each principal open to considering the proposal was mailed the application to conduct research in the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) and the notice of approval. Data collection was accomplished by self-administered surveys, using both closed-response and open-ended questions. The survey takes approximately thirty minutes to complete. A standardized questionnaire was used in order

to collect data from all teaching staff in response to exactly the same questions, using the same form and method of presentation (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). It was also hoped that the use of a standardized questionnaire would reduce researcher bias.

Principals of the participating schools allowed the researcher to use part of a regular teaching staff meeting time. Teaching staff were told by their school principals, prior to that meeting, that they would be invited to participate in a research study about teaching staff responses to children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. The researcher explained the nature of the study and the selection process of potential participants, guaranteed confidentiality if they agreed to participate, acknowledged the risk and described the value of their participation, responded to questions and invited them to participate in the study. A drop box for completed surveys was provided in the school office. Requests from any staff member for a summary of the study's research findings could also be deposited in the drop box.

A few educational assistants attended the teaching staff meetings where the researcher spoke about the study. Most educational assistants are unable to attend those staff meetings because of their schedules and were approached about participating in the study individually or in a small group. In all, approximately 120 elementary school teachers and 15 educational assistants in three schools were invited to participate in the study by completing the survey.

Instrument Design

The standardized questions on the survey were developed to explore the kinds of emotional and behavioral responses to acting out behaviors identified in the literature. Other questions on the survey were developed to explore some of the factors which the literature indicates contribute to those emotional and behavioral responses to children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. The survey was designed to provide opportunities for extemporaneous responses to most questions, as well as frameworks of

closed ended response choices to stimulate thinking about a broad range of responses. The tool was designed to include the following types of questions: 1)opinion/belief questions, 2) feeling questions 3) experience/behavior questions and 4) background/demographic questions.

Sequencing of questions was considered and organized with certain considerations in mind. The nature of the feelings explored in the survey are very personal. Hence it was important to begin the survey by acknowledging that teaching staff all have expertise as behavior managers. Teaching staff were asked to describe some of the factors related to their success as behavior managers. The exercise was intended to focus respondents attention on their own experience, in order to build some level of comfort with exploring this issue and the survey process before asking more feeling questions. Only then did the survey proceed to ask teaching staff to describe problems they've had as behavior managers. The survey then gave directions for completing the survey in a tone that is intentionally positive and supportive of teaching staff.

The model of "research as praxis" states that no social research is value free, and assuming it can be is to be unconscious of the values brought to the research process (Namenwirth, 1986, p. 29 quoted in Lather, 1986). This research was designed with a particular set of values about the issues and people it concerns. As with many social issues, the ways these issues are explored have the potential of reinforcing the problem instead of creating an intellectual space for re-evaluating the status quo (Lather, 1986).

The values designed into this approach to doing research are based in an ideology of empowerment (Holmes, 1992 as noted in Skretvedt, 1993). Its wording assumes strengths, skills, and intelligence in teaching staff. The instrument is intended to give teaching staff a voice in getting the kind of support they need with these issues. Completing the survey is intended to support teaching staff by providing a forum for re-evaluating their behavior management efforts. The survey asks questions in a way that

does not stigmatize children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors or teaching staff for having these very human responses to those behaviors. The survey assumes there is always room for growth, even for highly effective behavior managers, because behavior management is a process, not a *fait accompli*. The survey implies that it is the teaching staffs' job as behavior managers to help the child gain control of their behaviors. The survey assumes a high level of commitment to being successful teachers and educational assistants and a willingness to improve their effectiveness as behavior managers. The survey asks teaching staff to be openly proud in sharing the things they are doing well and free of self reproach as they share parts of their experience that are challenging and things they want to improve about their skills or attitudes. Finally, the survey assumes teaching staff experience frustrations in their work and that they are successfully coping with those feelings somehow.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The survey instrument was pre-tested with three teachers and four educational assistants at Kenny School, the site of the social work internship of the researcher. The pre-tested survey (Appendix B) was modified as a result of further study and the pre-test results. The survey used in the study appears in Appendix A.

The pre-test results established the content validity of the questions that were retained on the survey. The appropriateness of the responses indicated that the content of the questions was related to the study's research questions. The reliability of the survey instrument cannot be demonstrated by this study because of the limited return rate of the surveys.

Structure and Plan for Analyses of Data

Analysis of the qualitative data obtained in the research study was a process of finding common themes and differences, organizing the data into similar categories and describing those patterns and themes. The coding categories are drawn from both a

content analysis of the data and correspondence with research findings. The next step was to interpret the organized data by explaining the themes and patterns.

The reporting of the themes, patterns and concepts found in the data will substantiate findings from the literature review, but also be cognizant of new or different ways of organizing the data that may contradict previous findings or add new perspectives on the research subject. Essentially the researcher used a process of content analysis of the data (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). The data connected with each question from the standardized, open-ended and closed-response survey questions was reviewed to identify and describe similar themes and patterns.

The data were analyzed inductively, which means general principles were not imposed on the data in an attempt to make the data fit an expected hypotheses. Rather the data itself was analyzed to see if it pointed to any general themes and patterns (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Themes and patterns which correspond with findings in the literature were noted. Themes and patterns which seem to be unique to this study are described.

The data were analyzed to reveal differences and similarities of responses using two criteria described by Patton (1987). Those analysis criteria are "internal homogeneity" and "external heterogeneity" (154). Internal homogeneity is the meaningful similarity of data that is grouped together. External heterogeneity is the clear differences that appear between groups of data.

Chapter 4--Findings

The primary focus of this research was to describe and identify the emotional and behavioral responses of teaching staff to children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors and how those responses impact the effectiveness of teaching staff as behavior managers. The data was derived from teaching staffs' self-reports of their experiences. The following is a summation of the personal responses identified by teaching staff and their thinking about how those responses play out in behavior problem situations.

Though respondents were not asked to give their gender, the preponderance of teachers and educational assistants, particularly at the elementary level, are female. A decision was made to use the female pro-noun (she, her) consistently in describing the information and opinions shared by teaching staff on the surveys. Though at least one of the teaching staff who participated in the study is believed to be male, for the sake of fluidity, all teaching staff will be referred to as female when a pronoun is necessary.

Many of the questions on the survey were either open ended or asked respondents to choose as many of the closed response options as applied to their experience. Thus, when the data is broken down into categories of response, the numbers may add up to far more or less than the number of respondents to the study.

Pre-test Findings

As described in the methodology chapter, a pre-test of the survey instrument was conducted. The findings of that pre-test will be described here before proceeding to a description of the findings of the study itself.

Demographics (Pre-test)

Three of the pre-test respondents were teachers and four were educational assistants. This group of teaching staff had been teaching from four to thirty-five years. Three had taught more than twenty years and the other four had each been teaching for ten years or less. The average number of years of teaching experience of this group was 15.7.

Key Factors in Effectiveness and Ineffectiveness as Behavior Managers

The first three questions ask respondents to recall three children: one with whom they felt successful as a behavior manager, one with whom they experienced mixed results as a behavior manager, and one with whom they felt unsuccessful as a behavior manager. Following the trail of responses through the first three questions and answers on the survey showed a consistency of kinds of responses by each individual. One teacher referred to the influence of children's stressful home situations in response to the two questions that asked for factors related to her mixed or limited effectiveness as a behavior manager. Two teachers each said twice that the lack of support from parents and others, were factors in their mixed and limited effectiveness as behavior managers for children. Besides parents, those teachers noted lack of support from the school, a social service agency involved with the family, and inconsistent messages given to the child about his or her behavior.

An educational assistant focused on the difficulty or ease of reasoning with the child in all three responses about factors related to her success, mixed or limited effectiveness with three different children. Another educational assistant consistently referred to characteristics of the child in explaining her effectiveness or ineffectiveness as a behavior manager for three different children. For instance, "she is very antsy..." and "he has a stubborn streak". Two teachers referred to characteristics of their behavior management, such as "my own inexperience and inflexibility", "I engaged in power

struggles on occasion", and their success or failure in achieving rapport, structure, creativity, consistency and fairness. One educational assistant said she could not remember specific experiences of success or failure with specific children.

Feelings Acknowledged by Teaching Staff (Pre-test)

The feelings acknowledged by the pre-test group of teaching staff about a child who was particularly difficult for them were most heavily weighted on the following responses: "frustrated", "discouraged", and "relief when the child is not present or acting out at the moment".

Reasons Children Act Out Aggressive, Defiant or Disruptive Behaviors

Six of the seven respondents to the pre-test said one of the reasons children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors is because they need, want or are trying to get attention. Two teaching staff responded that children with these behaviors had seen them modeled at home, in the community, or on TV. Two teaching staff said children act out because they have "low self esteem". One described the connection between low self-esteem and acting out behaviors as children "redirecting feelings of inadequacy". Two respondents said children act out these behaviors because they are upset about something, are experiencing "inner turmoil". Two other similar responses were that children want to have their own way and want to feel powerful. Other perspectives teaching staff shared were that children act out because they:

live in the moment and don't consider consequences,
have been positively reinforced for these behaviors in the past,
are high energy,
are frustrated,
are scared.

Control of the Classroom Threatened?(Pre-test)

The pre-test group of teaching staff were evenly divided on the question of whether they've felt that their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's behavior. Two said yes, three said somewhat and two said no. This may reflect the fact that four of the seven pre-test respondents were educational assistants who rarely have primary responsibility for maintaining control in the classroom.

Which Behaviors are the Most Frustrating? (Pre-test)

Five of the seven pre-test respondents said that defiant and/or non-compliant behaviors by children caused them to feel the most frustrated. A teacher and an educational assistant gave similar responses which could be categorized as "discouraged behaviors". Those behaviors were "apathy" and "unwillingness to try".

How do Teaching Staff Deal with Their Frustrations (Pre-test)

The pre-test asked teaching staff what they have found to be effective ways to deal with their frustration. The responses were most heavily weighted on "seeking support from other school staff" and by getting "support from non-staff friends". Two teachers added comments about self-efficacy. They cope with their frustrations by thinking positively and confidently and believing they will succeed with children whose behaviors challenge them.

Additional Support Desired by Teaching Staff (Pre-test)

The pre-test group of teaching staff were asked what kind of support they would find helpful to them as behavior managers. Out of a group of nine possible kinds of support and an open ended request for other ideas, three types were chosen far more often than the rest: "more information about behavior management theories, treatment principles and practices", "more supported training and practical feedback in using behavioral strategies", and "more parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system".

Desired Changes in Behavior Management Style (Pre-test)

The pre-test group of teaching staff were asked if there was anything they would like to change about their behavior management style. Two educational assistants responded that they would like to be more patient. A teacher responded that she would like to change the quality of her own experience. She said she would like to "be more joyous inside more often--it is a more relaxed way of being for the teacher and positively affects the kids". Another teacher said "I would like to include more behavior management methods and be more creative in my approach".

Self-Efficacy (Pre-test)

The responses from the pre-test group of teaching staff about how often they felt themselves to be effective at helping children with acting out behavior problems were skewed in the direction of "virtually always", with two saying they felt able to help half the time or less.

Emotional Responses Impeding Effectiveness? (Pre-test)

The teaching staff completing the pre-test were asked for other thoughts about the connections between their emotional and behavioral reactions to children's acting out behaviors and their effectiveness as behavior managers. Each response was unique. One teacher said, "I sometimes feel that my discouragement gets in the way. (I'm sometimes reluctant) to relinquish control in situations where it might be beneficial to let the child take control". Another teacher described the challenges she faces, "to set aside personal problems and be completely present,...to decide to do and not to do certain things in relation to (children with acting out behaviors)". An educational assistant described her impatience with children who continue to be disruptive, "even after the use of time-out". She said, "My loud voice usually takes over by then, which gives the whole class a bad feeling". Another educational assistant described herself as having been in difficult circumstances as a young person, that were similar to those experienced by children with behavior problems in the school. Those experiences left her with the ability "to relate to

the child and the child's inability to concentrate,...many of the children are in survival mode". A third educational assistant attributed much of her success as a behavior manager to her non-reactivity to acting out behaviors. She said, "I think a lot of children lose the desire to act out if the adults in charge of them don't draw a lot of attention to the child's disruptive behavior".

Summary of Pre-test Findings

A broad look at the pre-test findings reveals a diversity of responses about teaching staff experiences working with children who act out aggressive, defiant or disruptive behaviors. Some frequent themes emerge as well as some consistency of perspective from individual respondents. Most of the teaching staff who completed the pre-test acknowledged having feelings of frustration, discouragement and fear in response to children who are behavioral challenges for them. The behaviors most of this group found the most frustrating were defiance and aggression, with the minority saying they found "discouraged behaviors" the most frustrating. Two respondents added similar comments about dealing with the frustrations of the role by shoring up their sense of their own self-efficacy. The most common attributions made about why children act out these behaviors were about wanting, needing or trying to get attention. Most of the pre-test group of teaching staff also spoke to the unique challenges each faces in dealing with their emotional and behavioral responses, in ways that would not continue to affect their behavior management efforts.

Findings of the Survey Itself

This section of the Findings Chapter will describe the responses to the survey itself, as opposed to the pre-test findings already described.

Demographics

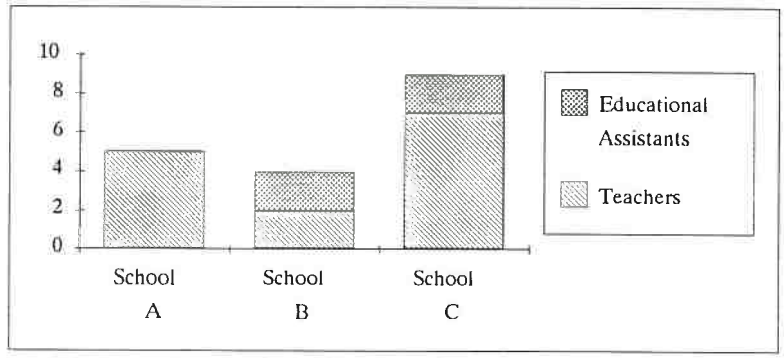

Figure 1: Number of teachers and educational assistants who responded to the survey

Three groups of 40-45 teaching staff at three Minneapolis Public Schools were invited to participate in this study for a total of approximately 135 people. Eighteen surveys were completed, which is a return rate of 13%. Five of the seventeen respondents are from School A, four are from School B and nine are from School C. Four of the eighteen respondents were educational assistants, two from School B, two from School C, and zero from School A. Seven of the thirteen teachers who completed the survey are classroom teachers, three are special education teachers, two are special subject teachers and two are Chapter I teachers. The number of years of teaching experience of respondents ranged from two to thirty. The average number of years of teaching experience of this group of respondents (the mean) is 17 years. The median number of years of teaching experience of this group is 23 years. The number of respondents to each question varies between sixteen and eighteen because respondents were told they could choose to skip questions if they wanted and two respondents did so.

Factors Related to Success as Behavior Managers

Respondents were asked to describe factors they thought were related to their success as a behavior manager with a particular child. The following is a compendium of

the responses by the seventeen respondents. Thirteen of the seventeen respondents referred to success using behavior management principals and practices, most often applied behaviorism. The management strategies noted were consistency, rewarding the whole class for helping another child behave, making opportunities for the child to succeed, use of a behavior management contract, clear expectations and follow through with rewards and consequences, particularly giving children special responsibilities, and carrying out lesson plans for highly engaging instructional activities. Personal rapport was sited by five of the seventeen respondents. Examples included the development of trust and being perceived as fair. Five of the seventeen respondents said their success was related to parent involvement. Three of the seventeen respondents referred to characteristics of the child, their desire to succeed, their intelligence, their maturity. Three of the seventeen respondents referred to characteristics of the teaching staff's behavior management style, such as the use of a calm voice, allowing children space to be upset in a crisis, persistence, firmness.

Mixed Results as Behavior Managers

Respondents were asked to describe factors they believed were related to mixed results in attempting to manage the behavior of another child. Ten of the sixteen respondents sited factors about the child, specifically, four said the child had highly unpredictable behavior and two noted a child's low self esteem. The other four gave less easily generalized responses:

> "The child is negative by nature, pouting even in response to positive feedback".
>
> "The child was highly motivated to succeed, but his anger was sometimes difficult to contain."
>
> "The child tends to "shut down" in a way that is compliant but puts up a defiant barrier." The teacher who said this expressed concerns of gang involvement.
>
> "The child has academic difficulties."

Nine of the sixteen respondents identified factors related to the child's stressful home/parent situation. Several of the respondents identified both factors about the child and factors relating to stresses on the child. Additionally, one respondent attributed mixed results as a behavior manager to the strong pull of peer pressure on the child.

Stresses experienced and challenges faced by teaching staff were noted by three of the sixteen respondents. Reported were numerous changes in the make-up of the class group, needing to "plan every movement" in relation to a child with acting out behaviors, needing to have "a whole chain of behavior management strategies to proceed through until finding one that works".

Rapport was once again noted as contributing to the positive results in a mixed results situation by two teaching staff. One of those teachers also noted that the child's work had been adapted so the child would experience success, but the problem lay in the difficulty of generalizing behavioral success to the child's regular classroom situation.

Factors Related to Unsuccessful Behavior Management Efforts

Respondents were asked to describe factors related to their limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for a third child whom they've felt unsuccessful at helping get their behavior under control. A majority of respondents, ten out of the sixteen identified various problems in the child's home experience or environment. Of those, four believed the children were victims of physical and/or sexual abuse. As one respondent put it, "He came to school so in pain--sexual, physical abuse, etc.--that he wasn't able to be helped in this building...".

The other six responses that related to problems in the child's home experience or environment were each unique. One respondent thought her limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for this child was related to the child's hunger and other basic care needs not being met. One described the child's family as "...very dysfunctional". She said, "The child's actions...reflected the family's feeling toward education". A teacher described the

child as concluding that "no one can make him do anything" as a result of a total absence of consistency on the part of his parents.

Five teaching staff pointed to problems or behaviors of the child as causal factors in their limited effectiveness as behavior managers. Three commented that the child had developmental, academic, and/or emotional needs "beyond the ability of a mainstream classroom to provide". Another said the child could not control their behavior without the external supports of counseling and medication. Four of the respondents talked about the child's non-compliant behavior. An educational assistant said, "The child refuses (to learn) most skills..." A teacher noted the child's lack of patience and success experiences and said, "...The core may be the child's immaturity." One teacher noted the child's inability "to focus on any behavior plan for more than a day or two,...several (behavior plans) were tried".

Two staff members noted factors related to their limited effectiveness which struck the researcher as simply descriptive of the child's emotional distress, rather than assigning responsibility. Those descriptions of the child were "mistrusting" and "extremely angry". Another teacher described a child's verbal abuse of his mother and his mother's inability to "handle him".

Only one respondent described a structural, school related factor associated with her limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for the third child. That teacher stated, "(A serious problem occurs when there are) many defiant, disruptive children in one class--sheer numbers can "beat me down!"

Six staff members described stresses in the child's life as factors related to the teacher's limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for the child. Two said the child they were referring to was in foster care, one describing the child's experience as "in and out of foster care", the other saying the child had been "on the run". Three teaching staff

noted children's negative role models, one commenting on the child's "streetwise age of seventeen". Another noted that the child's parents were recently divorced.

Just one teacher stated there were no instances where she experienced limited effectiveness as a behavior manager. This was attributed to the clear boundaries established for children's behavior. She noted that "one (child) tends to have problems upon leaving my presence and our classroom environment, perhaps (because of differences) in expected standards."

Reasons Children Act Out Aggressive, Defiant or Disruptive Behaviors

Teaching staff were asked to give some of the reasons they think children act out disruptive, aggressive and defiant behaviors. Their responses will be organized and described in two different ways. Both methods describe the attributions of causality expressed by teaching staff, but the first focuses on attributions with a blaming quality of placing responsibility on particular individuals or entities. Only specific designations of blame /causality were considered in this first glance at the data. The second includes all of the data and gives more descriptive detail about the content of teaching staff attributions. A pie shaped graph *(Figure 2: Attributions of responsibility/blame for children's acting out behaviors)* precedes the first description of the data. It shows the breakdown of the attributions made by teaching staff about the sources of responsibility for children's behaviors. The second method of describing the data is then summarized on a table that shows how often each kind of response was made.

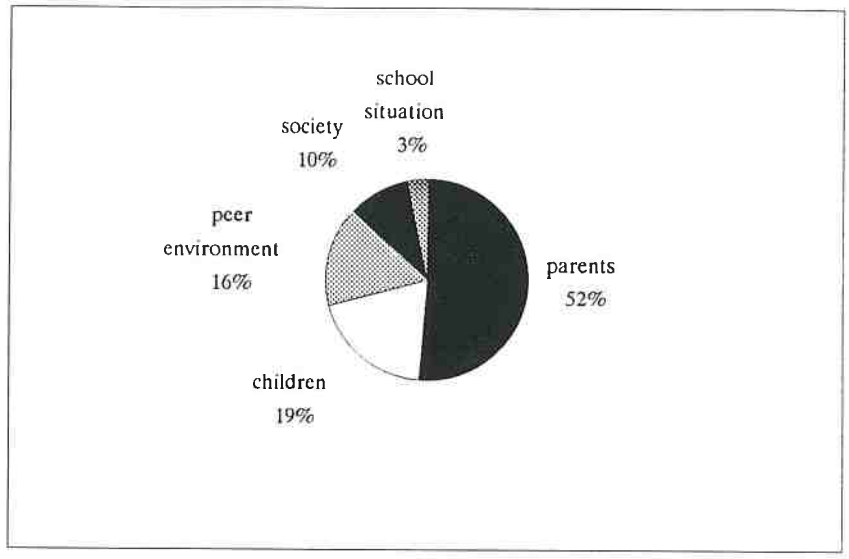

Figure 2: Attributions of responsibility/blame for children's acting out behaviors

Teaching staff perceptions can be divided into five categories of attributions of the source of the responsibility for children acting out these behaviors. Those "sources of responsibility" are, in order of the most to the least commonly sited among this group of respondents: parents (sixteen), the children themselves (six), the child's peer environment (five), the society (three), and the school situation (one). The attributions that place the blame on the children themselves were those that said children act out these behaviors to feel powerful or "to get attention", with no qualifying comments about why children seek attention by acting out. There were a number of attributions that either did not have a blaming quality of placing responsibility on any particular person or entity or the researcher could not determine from the comment, where the responsibility was being placed (eleven). They included children's need to process the hurts they've experienced, children's poor self esteem, poverty, children's boredom with school activities, that the curriculum seems irrelevant to children, and emotional, behavioral and academic disorders or difficulties.

Figure 3: Reasons teaching staff think children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors

		Number of Responses
I. Stressful home situations or social environments		14
a. behavior children have seen modeled in the home or community	8	
b. parenting failures	4	
c. parents' values and behaviors conflict with those of the school	3	
d. difficult family circumstances	2	
e. poverty	2	
(five respondents noted more than one of these factors)		
II. Emotional issues within children		17
a. poor self esteem	3	
b. anger	5	
c. the need or desire for attention	9	
III. Physically based problems		2
IV. Influence of societal attitudes		3
V. Learning difficulties		4
VI. Curriculum, response to the curriculum, teaching style, ineffective behavior management		3

Figure 3 organizes the attributions of causality in a more descriptive manner. Fourteen of the seventeen respondents noted aspects of children's stressful home situations or social environments. Respondents noted parents' ineffectiveness as disciplinarians, difficult home situations and parent's problems in meeting children's needs for attention, food, shelter, and health care. Eight of the seventeen respondents noted the important influence of behavior that children have seen modeled in the home or community. An educational assistant described children acting out these behaviors as a result of children not having "good examples to follow". One respondent said that "defiant, aggressive, disruptive *parents*" are the reasons children act out these behaviors. Three said they thought the reason children act out these behaviors is that their parents' values and behaviors conflict with those of the school. The specific attributions were that parents of children with acting out behaviors do not "value learning" and they fail to give children "pre-school literacy experiences".

Sixteen of the seventeen respondents noted emotional issues within children, either generally or specifically as poor self esteem (three), anger (five) or the need or desire for attention (nine). Of the five respondents who saw the child's anger as the reason they act out these behaviors, just two gave any explanatory information about children's anger. One attributed the child's frustration (anger) to their "lack of achievement". The other said the child's anger is "unrelated to me personally or to what has happened (in the classroom), but (is) feeding off (of) deeper hurts inside". The same teacher said that when an incident occurs in class that is similar to a hurt that a child experienced previously, it opens up a wound from that experience and the child seeks loving attention. Nine respondents said the reason children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors is that they are "looking for attention", "need attention", or to "get attention". Just four of those respondents gave further explanations about why they thought children seek attention by acting out. Those further explanations were:

> "...inappropriate behaviors have been rewarded in the past and the child doesn't know how to get the attention he or she needs in positive ways".
>
> These behaviors "may be the only way the child knows to get attention....This may be the common method of responding in the family and neighborhood".
>
> These children have a "need for attention without appropriate skills (for getting it)".
>
> "...to get more time from an adult at school. The work is too hard and the (child's) frustration is expressed in--'I'd rather get up and get others attention than look dumb while trying'."

Just two respondents referred to reasons for children's acting out behaviors that may be neurologically based, such as "emotional/ behavioral/ academic disorders".

Three respondents noted the influence of societal attitudes that "laugh at these behaviors on TV", "perceive kindness as weakness" and "define what is cool and uncool

about school". One of the reasons children act out aggressive and defiant behaviors was summed up by one respondent as simply "a violent society".

Four teaching staff noted learning difficulties children experience as the reasons they act out these behaviors, such as "unsuccessful at a variety of tasks" and "can't do the work" followed by "bored with the activity".

That last response, "bored with the activity", was one of three respondents who said children act out these behaviors in response to the curriculum or teaching style or because of problems with the curriculum itself. One said "lack of boundaries and consistent expectations" are the reasons children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors. This probably implies lack of consistency by staff within the school, as well as at home. These three responses are the only ones that attribute school related reasons for children's acting out behaviors.

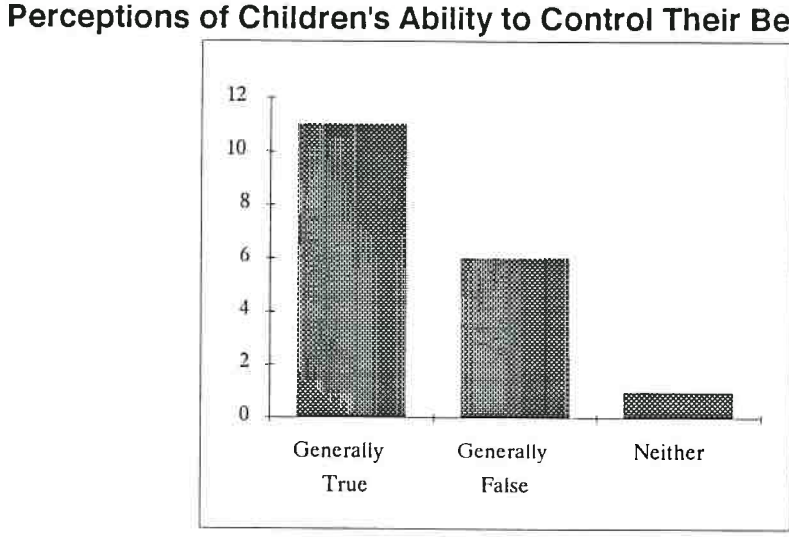

Figure 4: Children with acting out behaviors could control them if they really wanted to.

Eleven of the eighteen respondents said that, in general, children who act out disruptive, defiant, and aggressive behavior problems could control their behaviors if they really wanted to. One of those emphasized *generally*. Of those eleven, eight were teachers and three were educational assistants. Six respondents said the statement was generally false; children with acting out behaviors generally cannot control their behaviors, even if they really wanted to. Of those six, five were teachers and one was an educational assistant. One of the teachers who said children cannot control their behaviors expressed the sense that children are under lots of pressure to act out their behavior patterns. Another teacher who said children cannot control their acting out behaviors said, "it is much more difficult (for children with these behavior problems)--they need more stringent external (controls) to help (them) develop internal control". One respondent stated that whether the statement is generally true or generally false "depends (on the circumstances), I cannot circle either".

Control of the Classroom Threatened?

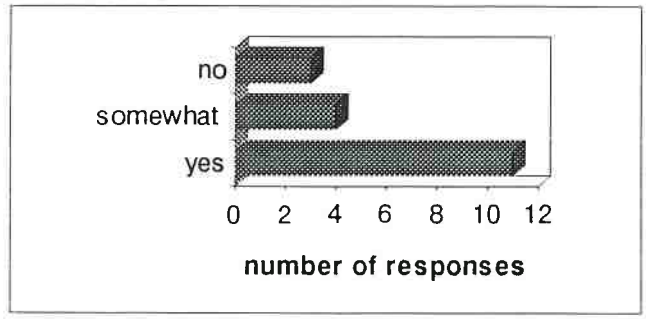

Figure 5: Have teaching staff felt that their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's behaviors?

Eleven of the eighteen respondents said that there have been times when they've felt that their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's behavior. Four respondents said there have been times when their control of the classroom was ***somewhat*** threatened by children's behavior. Three respondents said there have ***not*** been times when they have felt that their control of the classroom was threatened.

Feelings Acknowledged by Teaching Staff

Figure 6: Which of the following characterize your feelings in relation to a child with whom you've felt unsuccessful as a behavior manager, when the child is not present or not acting out for the time being?

	Number	Percent of Respondents
Momentary relief	16	89%
Determined to help the child with their behavior problem	10	56%
Tired, discouraged, wish you could make the child someone else's problem	7	39%
Irritated, frustrated	5	28%
Feel like it's not OK for professionals to have strong negative feelings in response to children's behaviors, but acknowledge you have them anyway	5	28%
Worried in anticipation of repeated misbehaviors	5	28%
No feelings I'm aware of	1	6%

Teaching staff were asked to describe their feelings in relation to a child that they've felt unsuccessful at helping get their behaviors under control. Responses from the

teaching staff included all of the feelings that the research has shown are common responses to children with acting out behaviors. Each of the feelings described was chosen a minimum of five times. Sixteen of eighteen respondents said they felt momentarily relieved that the child was not present or not acting out for the time being. Ten of the eighteen respondents said they felt determined to help the child with their problem. Seven said they felt tired, frustrated, wished they could make the child someone else's problem. Five respondents said they felt irritated, frustrated. Five respondents said they feel it's not OK for professionals to have strong negative feelings in response to children's behaviors, but acknowledge they have them anyway. Five respondents said they felt worried in anticipation of repeated misbehaviors. Just one respondent said she had no feelings she was aware of when a child whose behaviors challenged her was not present or not acting out at the moment.

Most Frustrating Behaviors

Figure 7: What kinds of behaviors by children cause you to feel the most frustrated?

I. Qualitatively **similar** acting out behaviors		12
A. Defiant behaviors	6	
B. Aggressive or violent behaviors	5	(3 of whom also said defiant behaviors)
C. Distracting other learners, not caring how their behavior adversely affects peers	3	
II. Qualitatively **different**, discouraged behaviors		4
A. Apathetic, disinterested, tired, inattentive, lack of confidence, unwillingness to try	4	

Other single responses: racism, lack of focus, passive aggressive behavior, whining, very loud voices, ignoring directions.

Teaching staff were asked what kinds of behaviors cause them to feel the most frustrated. Six respondents identified defiant behaviors as the most frustrating for them.

Three of those respondents and two others identified aggressive or violent behaviors as the most frustrating for them. Three teaching staff identified "distracting other learners", "not caring how their behavior adversely affects peers", and "constant talking out, disrespect" as the most frustrating behaviors for them. In *Figure 7* above, all of these behaviors--"defiant, aggressive-violent and disruptive" behaviors--are grouped together as similar, acting out behaviors. Four teachers, one from School A and three from School C gave similar responses, which could be categorized as "discouraged behaviors". They said the most frustrating behaviors for them to deal with were:

"Apathy--not caring one way or another anymore."

"Tired and disinterested--having not slept enough at home..."

"...lack of confidence, unwillingness to try..."

"Inattention."

The respondent from School A also mentioned distracting behavior, lack of focus, and whining. Other responses by just one teaching staff included racism, passive aggressive behavior, very loud voices, and ignoring directions.

How Do Teaching Staff Deal with Their Frustrations?

Teaching staff were asked what they have found to be effective ways to deal with their frustrations. The most common response (sixteen respondents) was by seeking support from other school staff. Twelve respondents said they deal with their frustrations by reading related professional resource materials. Ten said they deal with their frustrations by doing physical exercise. Nine said spiritual practices help them deal with their frustrations. Seven said they get support from non-staff friends. Six said they have found relaxation techniques an effective way to deal with their frustrations. Four people said journaling is helpful to them. Three or fewer teaching staff said they use social drinking or counseling to deal with their frustrations. Three said they set their feelings

aside at the end of the day. A teacher added the comment that she copes by recognizing that she "can't fix everything". Another commented that she deals with her frustrations by spending "time at home exploring options available to me, and setting plans and goals." Other strategies for personal coping mentioned by teaching staff include "music and a long drive home" and "listening to books on tape".

Children's Responses to Behavior Management

Teaching staff were asked to describe ways children respond to their behavior management efforts, that indicate to teaching staff that what they're doing may not be helping the children resolve their behavior problems. Twelve of the responses were related to the question. Four respondents said they know there is a problem when the behaviors don't stop or increase. One of them added that she would be concerned she wasn't helping if there was a lack of relationship between herself and the child. Two respondents said that they saw it as a problem when the child's behavior had not generalized to other settings, "when a child could behave with me-but not without me-I feel I haven't been effective, that I've been too powerful and controlling. ...children need to internalize (rules) and learn to make responsible choices."

One teaching staff member was aware of a problem when he or she got into power struggles with children. A teacher said that when she responded to children's behaviors emotionally, children give emotional responses in return. An educational assistant reported that "occasionally children say "You don't have to be so mean", when I'm only trying to be insistent."

Another respondent said she knew there was a problem when she encountered major resistance to using the behavior plan. One teaching staff member referred to the importance of flexibility: "I'm always changing what I do to respond to students' needs."

Another teacher said she would see a need to change what she was doing "if a child complies grudgingly or withdraws". Another saw several circumstances when she

would see the need for a change in strategy or personal response to children's behaviors: "When children aren't in place, go wherever they know they shouldn't be, ...yell, use profanity or argue about the fairness of my decisions or requests."

One teacher communicated the sense that its OK for children to feel frustrated in response to behavior management strategies. The respondent stated, "They are adjusting to stable, consistent adult behavior, which they aren't used to. Emotion is good, anger is an emotion that (children) understand, but (its important not to) lose control". Another had a similarly accepting attitude about children's responses to her behavior management efforts. The respondent stated, "Some children are antagonistic at first, but over the course of time they accept my authority, recognize the love and care and they respond--we (develop) a working relationship."

When is a Different Strategy Called for?

Teaching staff were asked if particular emotional responses by children indicate a need for a different strategy that better addresses the causes of the problem behaviors. The responses were clustered around "sometimes these responses would indicate the need for a different strategy". Opinion about whether a child having "feelings of fear and anxiety" indicates the need for a different strategy was the most evenly divided between never, sometimes, and usually. Opinion was also somewhat evenly divided about whether the child responding by "trying to control the situation, using testing behavior", would indicate a need for a different strategy. Other responses which several staff thought *usually* would indicate a need for a different strategy were: "sulking, grudging compliance or non-compliance", "anger", "feeling defensive, grinning inappropriately", and "the child becoming non-responsive". One respondent said that all of the indicators asked about would depend upon the individual child and what had been observed in them, but that non-responsiveness and fear responses are scary to her. Another teaching staff member said that often times a different strategy is not needed so much as to apply the current strategy consistently and for a longer time. One respondent said, "I use a variety of strategies". A

teacher said, "Resistance (to behavior management strategies) is natural--you have to judge whether their disgrunts (sic) are worthy or just a moan".

Though several respondents thought many of the emotional responses described would indicate a need for a different behavior management strategy, the general consensus seemed to be that it would depend on the particular child and circumstances.

Additional Support Desired by Teaching Staff

Figure 8: What kind of support would you find helpful with these challenges, both professionally and personally?

N=18	Number	Percent of Responses
More parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system	12	66%
More adults in the classroom, working with the children	12	66%
More supported training and practical feedback in using behavioral strategies	11	61%
More collaboration in the classroom with the school social worker, behavior specialist, or school psychologist	10	56%
Generally more constructive and supportive discussion of the issue among school staff	8	44%
More information about behavior management theories, treatment principles and practices	8	44%
Support groups on the topic offered by the employee assistance plan	4	22%
I don't need/want more support in my role as a behavior manager	1	5%

Teaching staff were asked what kind of support they would find helpful with these challenges, both professionally and personally. A group of nine possible kinds of support options were presented, with an open ended request for other ideas. Each of the suggested responses was chosen at least four times, except "I don't need/want more support in my role as a behavior manager", which was chosen by just one respondent. Two kinds of support were chosen by the majority of respondents. Those kinds of support were "more parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system", and "more adults in the classroom, working with the children" (twelve of eighteen). Three of the respondents were emphatic about how valuable it could be to have more adults in the classroom. One respondent stated, "The critical issue is to have enough

adults to guide those who have problems working independently, need warmth and attention, lots of basic skill development and are impulsive."

Another comment was, "Kids are getting "harder"-I need help and support *in my classroom*". A teacher added that School C is particularly good at supporting teaching staff by doing "parent outreach and education" and providing "support from the school psychologist, social worker and behavior specialist". More than half of the respondents said two other kinds of support would be helpful to them. They were "more collaboration in the classroom with the school social worker, behavior specialist or school psychologist" (ten of the eighteen respondents) and "more supported training and practical feedback in using behavioral strategies" (eleven of the eighteen respondents). Eight respondents said two other kinds of support would be helpful. They were "generally more constructive and supportive discussion of the issue among school staff" and "more information about behavior management theories, treatment principles and practices". A minority of respondents (four) said they wanted "support groups on the topic offered by the employee assistance plan". One additional idea was added to the list by two respondents: "Make parents more responsible for the behavior of their children". The other added, "...even if it means being with the child in school".

Do Teaching Staff Feel Well Supported?

The majority (eleven of eighteen respondents) felt "well supported" by teachers in their school and their grade level team. Half felt well supported by their school social worker and their principal in their work with children with acting out behavior problems. Half also felt "somewhat supported" by educational assistants. A teacher from School A commented that, "...everyone is doing their best to support each other, but we're all overextended in terms of the high number of children who need support".

Other Programs That Support Teaching Staff

Nine teaching staff noted programs in their schools that "have made a big difference in supporting their efforts at being an effective behavior manager". Three staff from School A all mentioned the Child Development Technician (CDT) who helps with behavior issues on buses, and is sometimes available to help teaching staff with behavior issues. Another teacher from School A said the PTA funds a positive behavior treat program. A teacher from School B answered "Climate for Learning", a program designed to help build a positive school climate. An educational assistant from School B said the CDT behavior room supports his/her efforts as a behavior manager. Four teachers from School C noted ten different programs or staff in their school that support their behavior management efforts. They included

1) Skill Streaming, a social skills training program,

2) A Place to Learn, a program designed to help build a positive school climate,

3) monthly meetings with collaborative teachers where behavior problems and their causes are discussed,

4) Parents as Partners, a program that involves parents in the school and gets practical help and information to parents,

5) friendship and scout groups,

6) the mentoring program,

7) behavior reward programs, and

8) the school psychologist and former social worker, who "are very helpful".

Desired Changes in Behavior Management Style

Teaching staff were asked if there was anything they would like to change about their behavior management style. Most responses were about wanting to become more effective, especially with children who are particularly difficult for them. Two were similar--"to remain calm on the exterior at all times", and "to not allow my voice to give away my anger, to remain even tempered". Two other responses may refer to teaching

staff discouragement, which can feel like tiredness or cynicism. One simply said she wanted "more energy". The other said, "As I get older I know I'm becoming more rigid and cynical. Age and experience bring a lot of wisdom and practicality-but also tiredness".

One of the teachers said she wanted "more consistency and follow through". Another respondent said she wants to become more alert to nuances of student behavior. In the context of this survey that response may be a reference to the survey questions which ask teaching staff to say which emotional responses by children would make teaching staff think a different strategy was called for. Another respondent spoke to the great need for flexibility "because what works with one child may be a total disaster with another". An educational assistant said the change in behavior management style that she wanted was to become more assertive. A teacher spoke to the challenge of achieving "a balance between discipline and love, a standard and clear boundaries for students/against a sense in them of how much I care". One teacher said, "I'd like to care less--to be able to put it all away at night, to sleep soundly without dreaming about children.

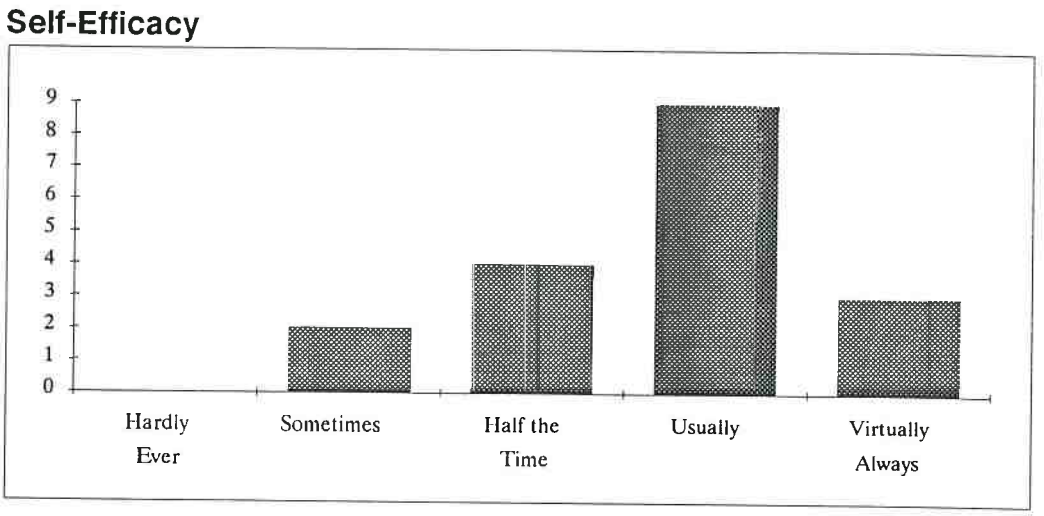

Figure 9: How often do teaching staff feel able to make a positive difference in helping students with acting out behaviors?

Teaching staff were asked to rank their own sense of how often they feel able to make a positive difference in helping students who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. The survey displayed a five point scale that included the responses "hardly ever", "sometimes", "about half the time", "usually" and "virtually always". Two respondents chose middle points between two of the response options. In order to simplify explanation of the findings a decision was made to push both responses up to the higher level of their self-reported efficacy. As shown in *Figure 9: How often do teaching staff feel able to make a positive difference in helping students with acting out behaviors?* , most teachers said "usually" (nine), and two teachers said "virtually always". One educational assistant said she felt effective virtually always. Three teachers and three educational assistants said they felt effective less than usually--four said "about half the time" and two said "sometimes".

Emotional Responses Impeding Effectiveness?

Several questions on the survey explore aspects of the connection between teaching staffs' emotional and behavioral reactions to children's acting out behaviors and how those reactions impact their effectiveness as behavior managers for children with these behavior problems. The last question asked respondents to identify the connections

between their reactions and their effectiveness directly. Two of the respondents inferred that their discouragement interfered with their effectiveness as behavior managers. One teacher stated, "Sometimes I have a very heavy heart. I need to remain clinical and unemotional so the logical consequences are delivered more effectively, so they (the logical consequences) are the salient feature of the management style." The other teacher said she is very concerned that our welfare system has created a whole generation of uneducated parents and children with a "hand-out mentality" and that dealing with these overwhelming needs "can make me feel very hopeless and helpless".

One respondent spoke to the universality of having emotional responses to children's behaviors--"We all get mad!" Another stated, "It is emotionally/physically draining to work with pupils who are needy even when most of my interactions (with them) are successful." She went on to say that it would make a big difference to her if "the general public realized that there are well trained teachers who give of themselves to provide safe, positive learning experiences and perhaps steer many children in a positive direction for all time". Another teacher spoke to the importance of positive discipline. "The more you "manage" behavior in a stern or negative way, the worse the behavior becomes. The more positive things you can do, the more positive the behavior...".

Two teachers shared personal experiences that had a bearing on them as behavior managers. One described her experience of teaching in another school where she was given many particularly difficult children to work with because she "was doing such a good job". One quarter of the children she had worked with the previous year were referred out of the mainstream school system into behavior programs. Though previously confident in her effectiveness, the teacher was emotionally overwhelmed by the experience. She found herself formulating behavior management plans while sleeping! The teacher reported that after leaving that school "for one with less severe behavior problems", she was slowly regaining her self-esteem". The other teacher described herself

as having been a "troubled kid with much potential". She came to understand her own past and the conflict she experienced between "acting up in class versus wanting desperately to be a good reader and student". She said her experience as a child with behavior problems gives her patience with the children she works with and "hope that they will choose the right steps".

Summary of Findings

A broad look at teaching staff responses to the survey reveals a great depth of awareness of responses to children with acting out behaviors. Teaching staff shared a diversity of specific challenges they face in trying not to let their emotional responses to children's behaviors negatively impact their effectiveness. The following is a summary of the most salient findings of the study:

- The most frequently attributed locus of causality was parents: in fact, parents were named more often than all of the other attributions added together.

- Though most respondents (61%) said children with acting out behaviors could control them if they wanted to, a significant proportion (33%) thought this was generally false, that children with acting out behaviors cannot control their behaviors even if they really wanted to. This was more true of teachers than educational assistants. In addition, one of the teachers refused to choose either response, saying a child's ability to control these behaviors depended on individual circumstances.

- Most respondents find acting out behaviors--defiance, aggression, and disruption of other learners--the most frustrating, but there was a significant showing of respondents who find discouraged behaviors--apathy, inattention, unwillingness to try--the most frustrating. Interestingly, most of those who found the discouraged behaviors the most frustrating were from School C. School C also had far more programs which their teaching staff identified as supporting their efforts as behavior managers.

- Most teaching staff acknowledged that there have been times when their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's behaviors.

- Most respondents acknowledged feeling relieved when a difficult child is not present or not acting out for the time being. This response may indicate respite from the fear of losing control of the classroom, or from fears about one's ability to handle these challenges effectively.

- The most frequently acknowledged feelings throughout the findings were frustration, discouragement and fear.

- Twelve of the respondents see themselves as effective or highly effective at meeting these challenges, while six said they felt effective half of the time or less.

- The kinds of support most desired by the respondents were greater efforts to support and educate parents, more adults working with the children in the classroom, more collaboration with behavior specialists in the classroom and more supported training and practical feedback in applied behaviorism.

Of interest were two minority opinions that were expressed. Many teaching staff acknowledged aspects of their behavior management efforts that they are working to improve but just a few acknowledged shortcomings in their curriculum or behavior management efforts as causal factors about children's behavior problems. The other minority perspective that kept reappearing was a teaching staff member who said there was no child she had felt unsuccessful in helping get their behaviors under control, another who said she had no feelings in response to a child who had been particularly challenging for her and one who said she neither wanted nor needed more support in her role as a behavior manager.

Chapter 5--Discussion of the Data

Teaching staff are aware of having emotional reactions to children's acting out behaviors and are concerned about children's responses to their efforts as behavior managers. The assumption must be made that teaching staff are the best authorities on the personal and professional challenges that are central to their effectiveness as behavior managers. This study asks the question, *how do teaching staff think their own emotional and behavioral responses to children's acting out behaviors impact their effectiveness as behavior managers?* The answer seems to be that at any point in time for each individual teaching staff member, their personal challenges are unique. Discussion will focus on the specific nature of teaching staff responses to children with acting out behaviors revealed in their answers to the study's survey. It will describe the attitudes, concerns, and assumptions of teaching staff in the light of research findings about these issues. The study's limitations and practice implications will be considered.

Locus of Causality

Teaching staff overwhelmingly attributed the locus of causality for acting out behaviors to parents and aspects of the home situation. This is in contrast with earlier studies (Medway, 1979) and more recent studies (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992) which attributed the locus of causality primarily to factors within the children themselves.

These findings may reflect a developing shift in social consciousness, the unique nature of this study's sample or the methodology used (discussed under *Limitations of the Study*, p.63.) Teaching staff may be developing a greater social recognition of the tendency to blame the victim. It is the researcher's contention that blaming children for having behavior problems makes no more sense than blaming a rape victim because she dressed provocatively. Indeed, except for attributions that children with these behaviors could control them if they wanted to, most of the responses to the survey indicate an awareness that children with acting out behaviors have been hurt.

Another factor which may have contributed to the study's respondents placing most attributions of causality on parent and home environment factors is demographic. Twenty years ago when teachers had one or two children with acting out behavior problems in a classroom, children with acting out behaviors stood out as different from the other children. At that time, the common assumption that the locus of causality lay within the child is not surprising. Today when up to half of the children in a classroom may have behavior problems, it makes sense that teaching staff are considering that there may be something else operating here, beyond some fault within each child. Teaching staff are aware that they've been expected to take on more of the nurturing and social development needs of children. It is the researcher's conjecture that teaching staff feel abandoned by the families of the children they teach. Some are angry because they feel they are doing parents' jobs for them, but have taken on those roles because 'somebody's got to do it!' A teacher made the comment, " I'd like to be a teacher instead of a behavior manager. If I'm going to be a teacher and a behavior manager, I need a raise". Another commented that it would make a big difference for her if the public would acknowledge the heart, sweat and tears teaching staff put into making a difference for kids.

On the other hand, the number of teaching staff making attributions that the locus of causality is within the child is significant. Examples include "The child refuses (to learn) most skills..." and "the child lacks patience...The core (of the problem) may be the child's immaturity" and the child has an "unstable mind". There were two kinds of responses that may imply that the locus of causality is within the child. Some respondents said the locus of causality is the child's anger without expanding on the roots of the child's anger. And some respondents said the reason children act out is to get attention, without any elaboration about why some children feel compelled to seek attention by acting out. Others made a point of saying what factors may have contributed to such rage within a child or why some children seem compulsive about trying to get adult or peer attention.

Children's Responses to Behavior Management

Teaching staff were asked what kinds of responses by children would indicate that the strategies they were using weren't helping children resolve their behavior problems. Most of the teaching staffs' responses were characterized by an awareness that teaching staff can harm children with misguided behavior management strategies. Teaching staff seemed to be expressing concerns about problems with behavior management efforts in four areas. Those concerns were

- inflexibility to children's needs,
- emotionally charged behavior management efforts, (such as a teacher losing control of her temper in response to a child who is hurting another child),
- inconsistency,
- and not providing children with the security of knowing that the teaching staff member is in charge, not themselves.

More detailed analysis of how teaching staff interpret and process children's responses to their behavior management efforts cannot be gleaned from this small sample or these particular questions.

Attributions of Ability to Control Acting Out Behaviors

57% of teachers and 75% of educational assistants said children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors could control their behavior if they wanted to. 43% of teachers and 25% of educational assistants either said this was generally false or that it depended on the circumstances. Considered together, these figures amount to approximately a 60/40 disagreement about children's controllability of their acting out behaviors.

As noted in the literature review, theorists and researchers have hypothesized that self-control is the pivotal issue for children with acting out behavior problems (Eron et al., 1971; Soleman, 1985). The process of recovery from a behavior problem is a process of

gaining or regaining pro-social control of one's behaviors. Respondents were asked to say if it was generally true or generally false that *children who act out disruptive, defiant and aggressive behavior problems could control their behaviors if they really wanted to.* The sixty/forty disagreement about this issue may reflect a lack of understanding about this key aspect of acting out behaviors.

Attributions of controllability may be condensed down to defining the role of teaching staff in response to children with acting out behaviors. If the crux of the problem is a child's need to develop pro-social self control, the teaching staff role becomes that of helping the child develop it. If, on the other hand, the child could control his behaviors if he really wanted to, the teaching staff role may become blaming, punishing, angry, unaware of the child's struggle to control his behaviors and focused on maintaining control in the classroom, to the exclusion of teaching the child pro-social control.

Most Frustrating Behaviors

This study confirms the findings of other researchers (Coleman & Gilliam, 1983; Safran & Safran, 1987) that teachers generally find the range of acting out behaviors focused on in this study to be the most frustrating ones for them. The possibility that supplemental school programs can result in teaching staff feeling well supported as behavior managers of children with acting out behaviors is also supported by this study. In response to the question *are there other programs in your school that have made a big difference in supporting your efforts at being an effective behavior manager for children with acting out behaviors?*, School C reported far more programs than Schools A and B. Examples included programs that address parent needs, programs that teach children social skills, a mentoring program and the use of collaborative, team teaching approaches. Several respondents from School C were less focused on their needs for support in working with children with acting out behaviors, and more focused on their concerns about children with discouraged behaviors. This may be the result of the successful support programs in School C.

The researcher's hypothesis is that teaching staff would not have the attention to focus on children with discouraged behaviors if their classrooms were out of control. Children with discouraged behaviors may fit the description of "internalizing" behaviors described in the literature review--quietly cooperative, but internally depressed and anxious. Despite the greater prognosis for recovery by children with more socially accepted behaviors, these are children whose problems may often go unattended in classrooms where several children with acting out behaviors are drawing much of the adult attention.

Control of Classroom Threatened by Behaviors

77% of teachers and 25% of educational assistants acknowledged feeling that there have been times when their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's behavior. The researcher sees this as indicative of several things:

1) That this fear of losing control of the classroom is a normal, human response;

2) That behavior management is one of the biggest challenges faced by teaching staff;

3) That teaching staff need significant emotional and practical support with these challenges.

Ownership of the Problem

Each respondent described factors that contributed to her success or mixed results as a behavior manager for two specific children, as well as factors related to her limited effectiveness with another child. More behaviors that are "shared ownership" problems were described as behaviors that teaching staff experienced success or mixed results in managing. These behaviors included poor social skills, low ability, low self esteem, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, hyperactivity, and pouting. Numerous successful or somewhat successful behavior plans were mentioned.

The behaviors exhibited by the children with whom teaching staff experienced limited success, on the other hand, were the more extreme acting out behaviors. Most fit

in the "teacher owned" problem category. Those behaviors were anger, mistrust, defiance, being out of control, being too 'streetwise', and low ability. Some teaching staff said there had been many failed behavior plans tried with this group of children. These behaviors may be a challenge to change no matter how they are viewed, but attributional inferences and low self-efficacy may make the challenge extremely difficult.

Differences in Responses by Educational Assistants and Teachers

This study's findings reveal interesting differences and similarities in attitudes and experience of these issues between teachers and educational assistants. Educational assistants responses to the survey questions were qualitatively similar to those by teachers on most questions, but there were important differences. The educational assistants had much less teaching experience behind them than the teachers who participated in this study--an average of eight years compared to an average of nineteen years by the teachers.

Self-Efficacy of Teachers and Educational Assistants

Educational assistants expressed less confidence than teachers in their ability to help children with acting out behaviors, but there is cause for concern about both groups' reports of their self-efficacy. As discussed in the literature review, an important factor in actual effectiveness is self confidence--believing in one's ability to succeed. Hence, the relationship between self-reports of effectiveness and actual effectiveness bears itself out in behavior management practice. 31% of teachers and 75% of educational assistants surveyed said they feel able to make a positive difference in helping students with acting out behaviors half of the time or less. The study reveals a need for some teachers (31%) and most educational assistants (75%) in the Minneapolis Public Schools to address issues of their effectiveness as behavior managers. Analysis of the ways in which this sample is likely to be skewed (in Limitations section) would indicate that this is a conservative estimate of the need.

Control of the Classroom Threatened?

Educational assistants were much less likely to say there have been times when they've felt that their control of the classroom was threatened by children's behavior (25% compared to 77% by teachers). Educational assistants find themselves in the position of being responsible for control of the classroom far less often than teachers. Even when an educational assistant is the only adult present, teachers and educational assistants may still consider the children's behavior the teacher's responsibility. Thus the finding that educational assistants feel their control of the classroom has been threatened far less acutely than teachers is not surprising.

Limitations of the Study

Participation Voluntary/ Small Sample Size

One of the limitations of the study is the small sample size--18/135 or 13% of those invited to participate. The poor response may be attributable to two factors: first, teachers are extremely busy--it's not surprising that only a small proportion found time to complete the survey: secondly, the study's topic was one with the potential for bringing up feelings brought to the surface in their work with children with acting out behaviors. In a society where difficult feelings are not generally experienced as opportunities for growth, it is not surprising that many staff decided not to participate in the study. Future studies that build on this and other related studies will need a much larger sample size in order to analyze the findings quantitatively. Qualitative studies provide a richness of personal detail to the data, but it will be important to attempt to quantify these results (Skretvedt, 1993).

The respondents are unlikely to be a representative sample of Minneapolis Public elementary school teaching staff. The voluntary nature of participation in the study probably skewed the results in unpredictable ways. The participants seemed to be either 1) teaching staff who felt particularly effective as behavior managers because they had

struggled successfully with these issues in the past or 2) teaching staff who were struggling with these issues in the present and wanted an outlet for expressing and processing those concerns. Some were probably also motivated by a desire to support the researcher or the research itself.

The researcher's hypothesis about the self-selected respondents is based on conversations with those who completed the pre-test as well as those who were invited to complete the pre-test and declined. Part of their decision to complete the pre-test had to do with their high level of interest in the topic and thus openness to sharing their understanding of the issue. One teacher declined to participate, saying that she had been teaching only five years and others knew far more than she did about this issue. She was not persuaded by the researcher's assurances that her perceptions were desired, not her expertise. Two other teachers were asked to complete the survey, agreed to do so, but did not follow through. The researcher sees them both as being successful behavior managers. The researcher's hypothesis about why they did not complete the survey is that they did not need any particular support around these issues in the present and, of course, are very busy, which is true of most teachers. All of the educational assistants who were asked to complete the pre-test did so. In general they seemed glad to be asked for their opinions, which was also true of some of the teachers. In addition, most educational assistants do not work full time and have less "bottom line" responsibility than teachers. These two factors may account for the higher rate of return by educational assistants who were asked to participate in the study [4 out of approximately 15 invited to participate (27%), as opposed to 14 teachers out of approximately 120 invited to participate (12%)]. Thus, by looking at the reasons some teaching staff completed the pre-test and some did not, the researcher made the hypothesis that the study's sample was skewed in particular ways.

Issues of Cultural Difference Not Considered

Another body of research, which was not noted until completion of this study, points to the roots of acting out behaviors in culturally learned patterns of interaction by African American boys (Dandy, 1990; McFadden, Marsh, Price & Hwang, 1992; Serwatka, 1986). Even very young African American boys may use words and gestures in a highly stylized manner as communication and survival strategies (Dandy,1990). Behaviors identified as "acting out" may reflect positive norms of African American male adult behavior they've seen modeled in their culture (Dandy, 1990; Serwatka, 1986).

In 1989, 92% of teachers were white and most of them were women, while just 4.7% of teachers were African American (Dandy, 1990). Several of these strategies could easily be experienced as disruptive, defiant and threatening through a mostly white, mostly female perceptual window. Many teaching staff may have little knowledge of the cultural reality of African American males. The fact that acting out behaviors are identified by the perceiver takes on dramatic importance when the implications of mis-understood cultural differences are explored.

The demographics of school behavior issues reveals the likelihood of racial bias toward African American boys. The disproportionate enrollment of Black children in special education, and in particular special education for the emotionally and behaviorally disturbed, has been well documented. In addition, African American boys are disciplined with suspensions, expulsions and corporal punishment far in excess of their white counterparts (Dandy, 1990; McFadden et al., 1992; Price, 1981). As Price (1981) stated, "these problems clearly signify a lack of competence in the area of behavior management" (p.7).

Research indicates the problem resides in the way educators view the cultural differences of Black students (Dandy, 1990; Serwatka, 1986). African American boys practicing these skills may see teaching staff responses as not only unexpected and inappropriate, but rejecting, frustrating and hostile (Price, 1981). Children may find

themselves being punished for the same behaviors they are being rewarded for at home. What may not have begun as a "behavior problem" for the child may become a behavior problem as a result of mis-interpretation and counterproductive responses by teaching staff. If teaching staff could convert these cultural strengths into positive teaching/learning tools, the likelihood of engaging, rather than alienating, African American boys in schools would be greater (Dandy, 1990).

Testing this culturally based explanation of acting out behavior problems could make important differences in how these behavior management challenges are approached. It becomes the responsibility of teaching staff to familiarize themselves with the origins, purposes and school uses of the verbal strategies used by African American boys (Dandy, 1990). Research that addresses the perceptual roots of the disproportionate referral of African American boys for acting out behaviors is limited and should be considered in future studies.

Methodology

Using an observational component of the study would have added more validity to some of the information gathered, but it was decided that it was valuable to explore this issue solely in the realm of teaching staff perceptions. This study is about how emotional and behavioral responses can impact children, both internally and in tangible ways. The study explores teaching staff awareness and process of working through emotional responses. Thus, self-reported perceptions are intrinsic to the study, though this methodology has important limitations. Much of the information cannot be viewed as objective facts, but as personal truths, perceived reality.

It should also be noted that in completing surveys, people have the tendency to give what they think are the right answers, rather than answers which accurately reflect their experience and behavior (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). The impact of these factors is unknown.

Gender Not Considered

This study does not break down differences in response based on the gender of teaching staff or differences in response to boys versus girls. In future studies differences in how men and women process emotional experiences may give further insight into how people process emotional and behavioral reactions to children's acting out behaviors.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Some important social work practice implications come out of the findings of this study. Teaching staff clearly express their need for support and training in the work they do with children who act out aggressive and disruptive behaviors. Instead of blaming teaching staff for their "failure" to meet the needs of children with these behavior problems, the school system could make a priority of getting teaching staff the support they need to do this work. The form and content of program support for teaching staff should reflect the needs expressed on the survey--teaching staff know what they need (Compton & Galaway, 1989).

Four kinds of program support were nominated by 56% to 66% of the teaching staff completing the survey. The following priorities were set forth in response to the question, *What kind of support would you find helpful with these challenges, both professionally and personally?*

1. More adults in the classroom, working with the children.
2. More parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system.
3. More supported training and practical feedback in using behavioral strategies.
4. More collaboration in the classroom with the school social worker, behavior specialist or school psychologist.

These priorities give a clear direction for allies of teaching staff in deciding how to provide and organize practical support. Today many children have academic, social, and

emotional needs that require individualized attention. Twelve respondents said more adults in the classroom, working with the children would make a big difference in their efforts to meet children's needs. One of the teachers said the critical issue is to have enough adults to guide children who have trouble working independently, who are impulsive, who need lots of warmth and attention and who need help with basic skill development. Although funding limitations are a perennial issue, it's important to make decisions based on input from educators working directly with children on a daily basis.

The high number of respondents who wanted more parent outreach and education corresponds with the understanding/attribution that parents, and stresses of the home environment, are at the roots of acting out behaviors by children. School social workers could provide parent support in the schools in the form of parent support groups and referrals to concrete services, parenting classes, and other social and mental health services. A necessary and appropriate role for school social workers is as advocates for parents with the school system, the county social service system, legislative bodies and the public.

Models of training and support that correspond with the third and fourth priorities have been researched and put into practice in some schools, both locally and in other parts of the country. A study conducted in the River Forest, Illinois public schools provided behavior specialist mentors for teachers, on request. It was highly successful both in reducing special education referrals (as well as costs) and in the rave reviews of the participant teachers (Buchholz & Pruitt, 1986). Both making collaborative consultants easily available and using behavior resource teachers in classrooms are common kinds of support programs (Buchholz & Pruitt, 1986; Andringa & Keller, 1991).

The research on teacher consultation programs has shown them to be highly effective at changing teachers' behavior and attitudes. Teacher changes were followed by changes in children's behaviors. Meyers, Freidman and Gaughan (1975) found that

consultation resulted in greater teacher understanding of student's emotional and behavioral problems. Other studies found that consultation programs resulted in an increase in the frequency of teachers' positive interactions with children with difficult behaviors and reductions in negative interactions with children with difficult behaviors (Meyers et al., 1975). They also found lower numbers of referrals for special education services and that behavioral consultation has been effective in improving students' classroom behavior (Meyers et al., 1975).

Andringa and Keller (1991) found the use of pre-referral collaboration resulted in improved student performance in most cases and that teachers felt professionally developed and supported by the process. The research makes a strong connection between teachers feeling well supported and their increased effectiveness at meeting children's needs. This research is also consistent with the data about teaching staff at School C. Perhaps they are more effective as a result of being well supported.

This study explored the needs of teaching staff by focusing on these issues in the Minneapolis Public Schools. In the context of the Minneapolis Public Schools, school social workers do not have time, for the most part, to work in collaboration with teachers in their classrooms. Funding more clerical support services to get social workers freed up from excessive paperwork could make them available to do more classroom collaboration with teaching staff. School social workers can also serve as liaisons to social service agencies in the community to set up social and mental health services to children *and* parents in the school setting. A few schools have secured funding through grants to provide social and mental health services to families on site. A few schools are pilot programs in the Minneapolis Public School system for the provision of mental health services in collaboration with Hennepin County. Another appropriate and necessary role for school social workers is as advocates of teaching staff in relation to on-site decision makers, the school system, legislative bodies, and the public.

Just four of the respondents said they would like support groups on the topic--responses to children with acting out behaviors--offered by the employee assistance program. This represents less than one quarter of the participants. It may be that support groups are a form of assistance that only some people are drawn to. Nonetheless, if this form of emotional processing is something that some teaching staff are drawn to as a strategy for re-evaluating their responses to children with acting out behaviors, the opportunity should be made available. The research findings of Scott-Little and Holloway (1992) suggest that encouraging a group of caregivers of children to reflect together on children's aggressive behaviors could influence their responses to the behavior. Becoming less isolated with the feelings brought up by children with acting out behaviors could make a practical difference for teaching staff.

Potential Use as a Training Tool

The survey instrument itself was designed to validate the experiences and acknowledge the difficulties teaching staff are dealing with as behavior managers. The process of taking the survey gave teaching staff a framework within which to reflect on these issues and re-evaluate their responses to acting out behaviors. It has potential use as a tool for staff training in any organization where behavior management of children with acting out behaviors is part of the role of staff. Responses to the survey could serve as a starting place for small group discussion of issues of emotional and behavioral response and effective behavior management. The survey's supportive tone could help create the safety that makes openness and growth around these issues possible.

Summary of Social Work Implications

A summary of the social work implications of this study gives the following specific ways school social workers should be allies to teaching staff and the children they work with. 1) School social workers should re-evaluate their own responses to children with acting out behaviors and become effective behavior managers. 2) School social workers should

model and teach those skills to teaching staff starting from a counselors' non-blaming awareness that reactive feelings and behaviors are painful for teaching staff and acting out behavior problems are painful for children. 3) School social workers should make themselves available to work with teaching staff in classrooms at their request. 4) School social workers should arrange for the school psychologist and Special Education behavior specialist to be available to work in consultation and collaboration with teaching staff in their classrooms at the request of teaching staff. 5) School social workers should bring social workers from community agencies into the school to lead support and training groups for parents, as well as students. 6) School social workers should communicate effectively about the needs of parents, teaching staff and students when related decisions are being made at the school site, within the school district, and in local, state,and federal legislative bodies. Examples include involvement in decisions about funding allocations for collaboration and consultation support for teaching staff, clerical support for school social workers, for income support and social services for families.

In accordance with the findings of this and other studies (Andringa and Keller, 1991; Buchholz & Pruitt, 1986; Dandy, 1990; Meyers et al., 1975), supporting teaching staff in these ways will make a positive difference in their effectiveness as behavior managers. This, in turn, will help children gain pro-social control of their behaviors and help create individually and culturally sensitive environments where children are engaged in the learning process. These ways of supporting teaching staff may be seen as another strategy for getting *blame* out of the equation. The question of blaming children for having these behaviors or blaming teaching staff for failing to effectively manage these behaviors can be replaced with confidence in their ability to do so and the feeling of being well supported in these challenges.

Summary of Results

The limitation of the study's small sample size means that its results must be interpreted as "apparently" showing the conclusions which have been drawn. Those apparent conclusions are as follows:

- A shift may be occurring over time in teaching staffs' attributions of the locus of causality of acting out behaviors, from factors within children to factors having to do with parents and home situations. But there also seems to be reason for concern that a significant portion of teaching staff continue to blame children for their acting out behaviors.

- Teaching staff seem to be aware that misguided behavior management strategies can harm children, particularly inflexibility to children's needs, emotionally charged behavior management efforts, inconsistency, and not providing children with the security of knowing that the teaching staff member is in charge, not the children.

- Attributions of controllability seem to coincide with the results of other studies, although there was a sizable group (almost 40%) who expressed the view that, generally, self control is not simply a choice for children with acting out behaviors.

- The finding that acting out behaviors are the most frustrating corresponds with other studies showing the same results. The study also points to the possibility that teaching staff in schools with numerous supplemental programs may be effectively supported as behavior managers for children with acting out behaviors. This may free up teaching staff attention to focus on the needs of children with discouraged behaviors also.

- Most teaching staff acknowledged having felt that their control of the classroom has been threatened by children's acting out behaviors, which also corresponds with the findings of other studies.

- In terms of ownership of problem behaviors, it seems likely that many of the successes and mixed results described by teaching staff were examples of work with children with "shared ownership" problems. By contrast, it seems that most of the more difficult behaviors teaching staff described as unsuccessful behavior management experiences were actually "teacher owned" problems. Teaching staff expressed the need for more supported training and practical feedback, and more collaboration with behavior specialists. Such program support could make behavior management of both "shared" and "teacher owned" behavior problems a more planful process.

- Bringing together the concept of "ownership of the problem" with the research about the roots of acting out behaviors, the assumption may be made that it can be very painful for a child to carry the fear and rage within him/herself that are expressed in extreme acting out behaviors. Perhaps personal and professional growth around this issue lies in recognizing that behavior problems are likely to be a problem for the child as well as for teaching staff, despite of the automatic tendency for teaching staff to respond to acting out behaviors with their own anger and fear (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991).

- The findings that 31% of teachers and 75% of educational assistants feel able to help only 1/2 of the time or less seems to point to a need to address the problem of many teaching staff feeling ineffective as behavior managers. The findings of other studies which make a strong connection between self efficacy and actual performance point to the need to support many teaching staff to become more effective behavior managers. The hypothesis that the group of respondents was skewed in the direction of teaching staff who see themselves as effective behavior managers or who are currently struggling with these issues, makes it probable that these estimates of the need are low.

- Training that develops self confidence, belief in one's own thinking and ability to act, may address a portion of the problem of teaching staff functioning less than effectively as behavior managers for children with acting out behaviors. Expansion of any of the program support ideas prioritized by teaching staff could improve the effectiveness of teaching staff as behavior managers.

- A final practice implication is that the study's survey instrument may be useful as a tool for exploring and re-evaluating responses to acting out behaviors. Some teaching staff have already made awareness of their emotional responses to acting out behaviors and the challenges they present them with, into a conscious process. Others have not and probably would benefit from support around these issues.

Appendix A: Survey Cover Sheet and the Survey used in the Study

You are invited to be in a research survey of teaching staff in the Minneapolis Public Schools. This study is being conducted by Bonnie Beckel, a Masters in Social Work student at Augsburg College who is currently interning at Kenny School. Her thesis advisor is Francine Chakolis, the director of the MSW program at Augsburg. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you work as a teacher or an educational assistant in an elementary school. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

Purpose of the Study: To learn more about teaching staffs' perceptions about interactions between themselves and children with disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors.

If you agree to participate, we are asking you to spend about 30 minutes completing a survey. When you have completed the survey, please put it in the drop box in the office. Besides my deep gratitude, there are no direct benefits of participation in this study. However, we hope that you will enjoy exploring this interesting and challenging aspect of our work.

The survey asks you to tell us what you need in your role as a behavior manager of children with these problems. Your participation will inform decisions about how to better support teaching staff. I would be glad to provide you with a summary of the findings when the project is completed. If you would like a copy please print your name and address on the sheet of paper for that purpose near the exit of this room or call me to ask for a copy.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Only the researcher and her thesis advisor will see your responses to the survey. No information that will identify you in any way will be attached to your responses. Any published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants. Research records will be kept in the home of the researcher, where only the researcher will have access to them.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: The nature of the issue this project explores is one with the potential of bringing up difficult feelings. I welcome your calls with questions or concerns about the survey. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Augsburg College, the Minneapolis Public Schools, your school program or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip any question(s) on the survey.

Contacts and Questions: Please ask any questions you may have about the study now. If you have questions later you can reach Bonnie Beckel at 724-0974. You may also contact her thesis advisor, Francine Chakolis at Augsburg College 330-1156.

Augsburg College Institutional Review Board Approval # 94-37-3

Survey of Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses

to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

To help focus your thinking on this exercise use a piece of scrap paper to jot down the names of three children you've worked with who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors, numbering them one, two, and three.

1. The first is a child with whom you've felt successful at managing the child's behavior. Please describe factors you think are related to your success with this child: [PLEASE PRINT]

2. The second is a child with whom you've felt sometimes quite successful and other times quite unsuccessful. Please describe factors you think are related to your mixed results with the second child:

3. The third is a child with whom you've felt unsuccessful at helping the child get their behavior under control. Please describe factors you think are related to your limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for the third child:

Please keep those and other children you've known with similar behavior problems in mind as you complete the rest of the survey. This survey asks teachers and educational assistants to share their experience of working with children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. We hope this survey will legitimately reflect teachers' and educational assistants' experience of working with children with these acting out behaviors. Please respond to the survey questions candidly. We want you to be both openly proud of the things you're doing well and free of self reproach as you share parts of your experience that are challenging or are things you want to improve about your skills or attitudes.

4. Your teaching position in the school is Classroom Teacher_____ Educational Assistant_____ Special Subject teacher ____ Special Education teacher_____ Chapter I Teacher_____

5. How many years have you been teaching, including this school year?_____

6. Some of the reasons I think children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors are:

1)

2)

3)

7. Children who act out disruptive, defiant and aggressive behavior problems could control their behaviors if they really wanted to. *(circle one)* generally true generally false

8. Have there been times when you've felt that your control of the classroom was threatened by children's behavior? (*circle one*) yes somewhat no

9. Which of the following characterize your feelings in relation to child # 3 (a child you've felt unsuccessful at helping get their behaviors under control), when they are not present or not acting out for the time being? (*check all that apply*)

a._____ momentary relief
b._____ worried in anticipation of repeated misbehaviors
c._____ irritated, frustrated
d._____ tired, discouraged, wish you could make the child someone else's problem
e._____ feel like it's not OK for professionals to have strong negative feelings in response to children's' behaviors, but acknowledge you have them anyway
f._____ determined to help the child with their behavior problem
g._____ no feelings I'm aware of
other _____
_____

10. What kinds of behaviors by children cause you to feel the most frustrated?

_____
_____

11. What have you found to be effective ways to deal with your frustration?
(Mark the ones that you use the most.)

a._____ Reading related professional resource materials
b._____ Seeking support from other school staff
c._____ Support from non-staff friends
d._____ Social drinking
e._____ Counseling
f._____ Spiritual practices
g._____ Physical exercise
h._____ Relaxation techniques
i._____ Journaling
j._____ I set my feelings aside at the end of the day

Others_____

12. In what ways do children respond to a) your behavior management strategies and b) your emotional responses, that indicate to you that what you're doing may not be helping children resolve their acting out behavior problems?

a)

b)

13. In particular, would any of the following responses by children indicate the need for a different strategy that might better address the causes of the problem behaviors (1) never, (2) sometimes, or (3) usually? *(Circle one for each response described.)*

	never	**sometimes**	**usually**
a. sulking, grudging compliance or non-compliance	1	2	3
b. trying to control the situation, testing behavior	1	2	3
c. anger	1	2	3
d. feeling defensive, grinning inappropriately	1	2	3
e. feelings of anxiety or fear	1	2	3
f. becoming non-responsive	1	2	3

other thoughts_____

_____

_____

14. What kind of support would you find helpful with these challenges, both professionally and personally? (*check all that apply, add your opinions*)

_____ more adults in the classroom, working with the children
_____ generally more constructive and supportive discussion of the issue among school staff
_____ more collaboration in the classroom with the school social worker, behavior specialist or school psychologist
_____ support groups on the topic offered by the employee assistance plan
_____ more information about behavior management theories, treatment principles and practices
_____ more supported training and practical feedback in using behavioral strategies
_____ different kinds of support from the school psychologist, school social worker, or behavior specialist (*please describe below*)
_____ more parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system
_____ I don't need/want more support in my role as a behavior manager

other ideas _____

_____

_____

15. How well supported do you feel by the resources and staff in your building in working with children with acting out behavior problems? (*circle the number under the level of support you experience from these sources in your building.*)

	well supported	**somewhat supported**	**minimally supported**
Grade level team	1	2	3
CTARS team	1	2	3
Special education team	1	2	3
teachers in your school	1	2	3
educational assistants	1	2	3
your principal	1	2	3
your social worker	1	2	3

16. Are there other programs in your school that have made a big difference in supporting your efforts at being an effective behavior manager for children with acting out behaviors? _____
If yes, what are they? _____
_____

17. Is there anything you would like to change about your behavior management style?

_____
_____

18. In my role as a behavior manager, I feel able to make a positive difference in helping students who act out disruptive, defiant, or aggressive behaviors (*circle one*)

1	2	3	4	5
hardly ever	sometimes	about half the time	usually	virtually always

19. Other thoughts about the connections between your emotional and behavioral reactions to children's acting out behaviors and how they impact your effectiveness as a behavior manager for children with these behavior problems:

Thank you for your participation in this research project!

Appendix B: Survey used in the Pre-test

Survey of Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses to Children Who Act Out Disruptive, Defiant or Aggressive Behaviors

To help focus your thinking on this exercise use a piece of scrap paper to jot down the names of three children you've worked with who act our disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors, numbering them one, two and three. The first is a child with whom you've felt fairly completely successful in managing the child's behavior. The second is a child with whom you've felt sometimes quite successful and other times quite unsuccessful. The third is a child with whom you've felt pretty completely unsuccessful at helping the child get their behavior under control.

Please describe the factors you think are related to your success with the first child: [PLEASE PRINT]

Your mixed results with the second child:

your limited effectiveness as a behavior manager for the third child:

Please keep those and other children you've known with similar behavior problems in mind as you complete the rest of the survey. This survey asks teachers and educational assistants to share their experience of working with children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. We hope this survey will legitimately reflect teachers and educational assistants' experience of working with children with these acting out behaviors. Please respond to the survey questions candidly. We want you to be both openly proud of the things you're doing well and free of self reproach as you share parts of your experience that are challenging or are things you want to improve about your skills or attitudes.

1. Your teaching position in the school is Classroom Teacher____ Educational Assistant____ Special Subject Teacher____ Special Education Teacher____ Chapter I Teacher____

2. How many years have you been teaching, including this school year? _____

3. My particular **strengths** as a behavior manager are *(circle all that apply)*

a. my patience b. my tenacity c. my academically based conceptual knowledge

d. my use of a variety of strategies e. my sincere liking of all children

f. my immediate response with both positive and negative feedback

g. making a point of cueing desired behavior when interrupting inappropriate behavior

h. my efforts to make my classroom and curriculum reflect my diverse group of students

i. having high behavioral expectations of children j. my experience based conceptual knowledge

k. engaging parents in behavior management strategies l. my consistency

m. prioritizing "catching the child being good" over policing, correcting strategies.

n. my clearly devised and stated rules o. my teaching of social problem solving

p. giving children amounts of responsibility they can use successfully

q. other (please state)_____

4. Which of the following characterize your feelings in relation to child # 3 (a child you've felt unsuccessful at helping get their behaviors under control), when they are not present or not acting out for the time being? *(circle all that apply)*

a. relief b. dread c. feeling of dislike for the child d. no feelings I'm aware of e. feel angry toward the child f. scared g. frustrated h. feel like a tentative success i. feel like a failure j. feel like killing the child in interesting, graphic ways k. pleasant feelings toward the child l. feeling of struggling to keep the classroom under control m. tired n. threatened o. discouraged p. feel like it's not OK for professionals to have strong negative feelings in response to children's behaviors, but acknowledge you have them anyway q. feel like the child does this behavior to irritate you r. feel like the child acts our these behaviors to get attention p. wish you could make the child someone else's problem

q. other_____

5. Some of the reasons I think children act out defiant, aggressive or disruptive behaviors are:

1)

2)

3)

6. Have there been times when you've felt that your control of the classroom was threatened by children's behavior? *(circle one)* yes somewhat no

7. What works best for you in regaining/maintaining control of the situation 1) on a routine, day to day basis and 2) in the face of exceptionally disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors?

1)_____
_____
_____

2)_____
_____
_____

8. Which of these behavior management strategies do you use in the classroom? *(check as many as apply)*

indirectly remind a child of the consequences of their behavior, i.e. telling the class or another staff member that it's "too bad" some kids won't get a privilege because they're not complying with an expected behavior_____
positive feedback for pro-social behaviors_____
timeout_____
seek social worker's or principal's support to gain compliance with classroom behaviors_____
ignoring unobtrusive acting out behaviors_____
threatening consequences for acting out behaviors_____
follow through on consequences for acting out behaviors_____
pairing interruption of acting out behaviors with cueing the desired behavior_____
take child aside to discuss acting out behaviors when you get a chance in order not to disrupt the flow of classroom activitities_____
let the child know you're trying to help them learn how to control their behaviors_____
engage the class in helping the acting out child with their problem_____
process problem behaviors with the class without naming any particular children_____
use your positive attention as a reinforcer_____
use material things as reinforcers--candy, stickers etc.____
interrupt acting out behaviors loudly enough for the whole class to hear_____
use privileges as reinforcers, such as leadership tasks_____
immediate interruption of acting out behaviors_____
seek parental support to gain compliance with school behaviors_____
use daily self rating cards to help children learn to monitor their own behavior_____
avoid use of timeout_____
other_____

9. What kinds of responses from children have you observed after the use of behavior management strategies? *(check all that you've seen)*

compliance_____
proud or pleased with him/herself_____
other children reject the child disciplined_____
no reaction_____
anger_____
same behavior repeated_____
inappropriate grinning_____
different acting out behavior occurs_____
relieved compliance_____
non-compliance_____
grudging compliance_____
sulking_____
lashing out_____
defensiveness_____
fear_____
resistance_____
negotiated compliance(cooperation in exchange for promised rewards)_____
showing off their successes_____
other (please describe)_____

10. What kinds of behaviors by children cause you to feel the most frustrated?

_____

_____

11. What have you found to be effective ways to deal with your frustrations? *(please check and describe all that apply)*

Reading related professional resource materials_____
Seeking support from other school staff _____
Support from non-staff friends---1)teachers_____2)non-teachers_____
Social drinking_____
Spiritual practices_____
Physical exercise_____
Relaxation techniques_____
Counseling_____
Journaling_____
Others_____

12. What kind of support would you find helpful with the challenges you face personally and professionally in managing the behavior of children with disruptive, defiant, or aggressive behaviors? *(check all that apply, add your opinions)*

_____more adults in the classroom, working with the children
_____generally more constructive and supportive discussion of the issue among school staff
_____more collaboration in the classroom with the school social worker, behavior specialist or school psychologist
_____support groups on the topic offered by the employee assistance plan
_____greater exposure to and understanding of behavior management theories and practices
_____different kinds of support from the school psychologist, school social worker or behavior specialist *(please describe below)*
_____more parent outreach and education by the county social service or school system

other ideas _____

13. How well supported do you feel by the resources in your building in working with children with acting out behavior problems?
(mark an X below the level of support you experience from these resources in your building)

	well supported	somewhat supported	minimally supported
Grade level team			
CTARS team			
Special education team			
your principal			
your social worker			

14 Are there other programs in your school that have made a big difference in supporting your efforts at being an effective behavior manager for children with acting out behaviors?_____
If yes, what are they?_____
_____

15. What are the stressors that you think are going on in the lives of children with acting out behaviors that you work with? (*check all that apply*)

_____aggressive parental modeling of discipline as the primary strategy
_____very limited positive reinforcement at home
_____being a minority in a culture that does not reflect their own experience
_____expectations of adult responsibilities at home
_____parental chemical abuse
_____poverty
_____sexual abuse
_____neglect, inadequate care
_____frequent moves and/or school changes
_____feelings of fear or defensiveness
_____parental chronic illness
_____coping with a developmental disability
____feelings of discouragement, hopelessness
____physical abuse
____peer rejection
____parental discord
____exposure to violence in the community
____parental physiological problems
____single parented
____coping with learning difficulties

16. Is there anything you would like to change about your behavior management style?

_____
_____

17. In my role as a behavior manager, I feel able to make a positive difference in helping students who act out disruptive, defiant, or aggressive behaviors (*circle one*)

hardly ever sometimes about half the time usually virtually always

18. Other thoughts about the connections between your emotional and behavioral reactions to children's acting out behaviors and how they impact your effectiveness as a behavior manager for children with these behavior problems:

19. Children work on their disruptive, defiant or aggressive behavior problems with me because

20. Is there anything more you'd like to say about these issues or this survey?

Appendix C: Minneapolis Public Schools Research Proposal

1. Title and purpose of study?

The title of the study is: **Elementary School Teaching Staffs' Responses to Children Who Act** dynamics of interactions between elementary school teaching staff and children who act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. Many teaching staff respond less than effectively to children with acting out behaviors, possibly for several reasons. One is that their own emotional and behavioral reactivity to those behaviors may get in the way of their effectiveness as behavior managers. Other reasons may include lack of understanding about why children act out with aggressive and disruptive behaviors and lack of supported training in applied behaviorism. Research by Brophy and McCaslin (1992) has shown that teachers' responses to children with these behavior problems are often minimally grounded in theory and treatment principles, and are often blaming and assume that children with these behavior problems could control their behaviors if they cared to do so. The research also revealed that teachers *generally* respond to children's behavior problems with concern and attempts to help, but this was not the case when the children's behaviors threatened or irritated them, as was frequently the case with hostile-aggressive and defiant behaviors. That study also showed that teachers respond to children with these particular behavior problems with the *least* long term solutions that addressed the causes of the problem behavior, and the *most* anger, rejection and emphasis on short term control and punishment. Behavior management of children with disruptive and aggressive behavior problems can be like traversing a mine field of our own emotional and behavioral reactivity (Barkley, 1981, Eron, et al., 1971, Patterson, 1982). Feeling threatened, frustrated and discouraged are common responses to disruptive and aggressive behaviors. Unfortunately those feelings and reactions can reinforce aggressive and disruptive behaviors instead of supporting the development of pro-social behaviors.

2. How will this study benefit the Minneapolis Public Schools?

This study will follow up on some of the findings of research by Brophy and McCaslin (1992) which analyzed teachers' strategies for managing twelve different behavior problems. This study may give social workers and teaching staff a better understanding of common kinds of responses to children with disruptive, defiant and aggressive behavior problems. That information plus the suggestions shared by teaching staff about their needs as behavior managers, will be valuable in the development of training and support for teaching staff, social workers, and parents. This study will do some comparative analysis of differences in three randomly chosen elementary schools that may have an impact on teaching staffs' attitudes about working with children with acting out behaviors. It will also explore differences and similarities in attitudes and experience of these

issues between teachers and educational assistants. The survey instrument itself is designed to validate the experiences and acknowledge the difficulties teaching staff are dealing with as behavior managers. The process of taking the survey will give teaching staff a framework within which to reflect on these issues and re-evaluate their responses to acting out behaviors.

3. What do you plan to do? Give specific information on design of study, measuring instruments, sampling, data collection procedures. What instructions will be given to students and staff? If non standardized instruments are to be used, attach copies.

This project will invite approximately 130 elementary school teachers and educational assistants to participate in the study by completing a survey. I am hoping approximately 50 teaching staff in three Minneapolis Public Elementary Schools will agree to do so. If any school principals decline, I will randomly select another school (or schools) to invite to participate. I will request the use of a regular teaching staff meeting time to explain the study to the teaching staff and invite them to participate in the study. Teaching staff will get the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher at that time. I will tell the principal of each school that I want to include both teachers and educational assistants in the study. If the staff meeting time is one that most educational assistants are not available to attend, I will arrange a time to meet with the educational assistants when it is convenient for most of them, such as a late morning meeting. I will ask teachers and educational assistants who complete the survey to identify their position so I can analyze the data separately as well as together. The survey will take approximately thirty minutes to complete. I will be asking for a fifteen minute time slot to say a few words and respond to questions about the study. Respondents may complete the survey at another time that is convenient for them. I will provide a drop box in the school's office, with a notice on it that gives the deadline for returning completed surveys. That deadline will be five school days after the invitation to take part in the study. The survey and interviews will include both closed-response and open-ended questions. I will be pre-testing the survey with five teachers and five educational assistants at Kenny School, where I am working this school year as a social work intern. A copy of the survey instrument follows this summary.

The nature of the issue this project explores is one with the potential of bringing up difficult feelings for the teaching staff being surveyed. To help minimize that risk, I will make it clear that I am seeking their informed consent to participate in the study and that deciding that they do not care to do so is a perfectly acceptable option. I will also make it clear that I will keep their responses on the survey confidential, that only myself and my thesis advisor will see them, and that no information that will identify them as individuals will be put on the surveys. In addition, any published report will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants.

The consent form includes these pieces of information, as well as saying that the survey may bring up difficult feelings. People may call me with questions about the study at their convenience. I will make it clear that the intention of the study is to be of help to teaching staff about this issue. I wrote the survey in a way that is intentionally positive and supportive of the vitally important work done by teachers and educational assistants. The thrust of this study is not about how teachers have failed. Rather the survey assumes that teaching staff are committed to children, do as well as they can to help children with these behavior problems, and want to become even more effective behavior managers. I will let them know that I hope teaching staff will benefit from this opportunity to notice their successes, describe their needs and re-evaluate their responses to acting out behaviors.

Explanation and Instructions to Teaching Staff: I will tell the teaching staff who I am and the context in which I'm conducting this study. I will say something very similar to this: "I was drawn to this research topic because trying to respond effectively to children who act out disruptive and aggressive behaviors have been the biggest challenges I've faced as a social worker, child care provider and an educational assistant. This research study is an effort to better understand how teachers and educational assistants respond when children act out disruptive, defiant or aggressive behaviors. I want to find out what you think about the roots of these behaviors, what feelings come up for you when you're working with children with particularly difficult behavior problems, and what you've noticed about how children respond to your efforts. There is some research that shows that our emotional responses to these particular kinds of behaviors can interfere with our effectiveness in helping children with these behavior problems. I'm looking forward to hearing what you've figured out about that. The survey will ask you to say what *kind* of support would be of help to you. The survey may provide information that will be useful in better supporting teachers, educational assistants, parents and social workers around this challenging aspect of our work."

I will ask the teaching staff to read the cover sheet of the survey and ask any questions they have as they are deciding whether to participate in the study. I will talk to the potential participants about the potential risk of the survey bringing up difficult feelings and say the information I described above about how I've tried to minimize that risk. I will also make a point of asking the teaching staff not to give me the actual names of any children on the survey, in order to protect their privacy.

4. What request are you making of the Minneapolis Public Schools? Specify numbers of students and staff to be involved, length of time and time schedule.

I am asking the Minneapolis Public School system to allow this study to be carried out in three elementary schools in the district. Approximately 130 teaching staff would be invited to participate in the study. I'm hoping approximately 50 people agree to take part in the study. The survey will take about thirty minutes to complete. The process of describing the study and responding to questions will require approximately 15 minutes of a regularly scheduled teaching staff meeting. I plan to "collect the data" in this manner during the month of March, 1994. I will set up the meeting time at each school when I meet with the school principals during March, 1994. The analysis of the data, further review of related research, and writing will be completed by mid-May, 1994.

5. List all of the sources of funding for your study.

Most of the costs of the study will be absorbed by myself. Augsburg College supports thesis research projects by students in the MSW program by funding thesis advisory positions, including my thesis advisor, Francine Chakolis. Augsburg also pays a reader's fee to three people who evaluate the completed thesis: two academics in related fields of study and a social worker.

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